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## Who are Church Schools For? Towards an Ecclesiology for Church of England Voluntary Aided Secondary Schools

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**Who are Church Schools For?**  
*Towards an Ecclesiology for*  
*Church of England Voluntary Aided*  
*Secondary Schools*

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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There is a mismatch between the Church of England's own self-conception and the realities of modern post-Christian England, which consists in a failure to recognise the vestigial nature and redundancy of a 'church for the nation' ecclesiology in an age when the CE is clearly, in classical sociological terms, a denomination-type. This impacts on the practice and perceived function of Anglican Christianity, and although baptism is treated as illustrative, the principle focus is the role and purpose of CE secondary schools, viewed theoretically within a spectrum of ecclesiological modelling, and more practically as responding to recent ecclesio-political imperatives, notably the Dearing Report of 2001, and the rhetoric and debate surrounding its release and subsequent mutation.

The first section (Chapters 1 and 2) is diagnostic of the current state of the church, reviewing sociological and cultural theory, and arguing on ecclesiological grounds that the CE now has the status of one denomination among many, which implies a more modest and realistic role in its affairs, particularly in the education system, than the traditional ecclesia (church)/establishment model might have entailed. The second section (Chapters 3 - 6) traces the history of the CE's educational role, and examines the crucial issue for understanding the purpose of church schools: admissions policies. In this discussion the links between admission to the church (baptism) and admission to the church school are drawn out and explored. The framework established in the first section is used to illuminate the argument of the third section (Chapters 7 and 8) which provides a detailed account of the church's current role in education represented by the appearance and reception of the Dearing Report in 2001. The contention is that the attachment to the 'church for the nation' model has led to complicity with contemporary political expedients at the cost of a meaningful identity for church schools. The conclusion is that recognition of the more modest status of the CE would provide a clear rationale for its schools in particular, and Faith Schools in general. Chapter 8 offers an alternative voice to 'Dearing'. The final chapter, having investigated wider yet germane issues, provides an ecclesiological model of the 'single Faith nurture' school.

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## Introduction

My general aim is to assess the ecclesiological implications of the continuing presence and further development of Church of England (CE) Voluntary Aided (VA) Secondary Schools within the English state school system, and to consider their purpose. More specifically, I shall question who ought to be admitted to these 'Faith schools'<sup>1</sup>: only those who are committed members of the Church of England; or those in membership of other Christian denominations, or even of other World Faiths, as well; or simply anyone at all.

I shall consider what involvement in the provision of state education implies about the church's understanding of the role of Christian faith in a secular, arguably post-Christian society, and what it implies about the church's understanding of itself. This will require elucidation of the role of such schools both in society at large, where they have a significant legal and institutional position, and also within the church of which they are a part. There is a mutuality of enquiry here: church schools will help us understand something of the nature of the church; while an understanding of the nature of the church will shed light on the rationale for church schools. This discussion will also contribute to what has become a much broader debate: is there a rationale for 'Faith schools'?

I shall specifically argue that

1. the admissions policy is a key tool by which governors of VA (and Foundation) schools seek to realise their vision for their school (what sort of school they want it to be), and further that such policies are not only central and critical to understanding the school's role and purpose, but they also have a profound effect on the ethos of the school;

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Faith school' came into vogue in the national debate that followed the publication of the Dearing Report in June 2001 (*The Way ahead*), and is used to denote any school with a religious foundation.



2. because CE schools are part of the church, they will reflect, not only in the way they operate (as evaluated, for example, through inspection reports<sup>2</sup>), but specifically in and through their admissions policies, some understanding of the nature of the church and its mission;
3. the framing of individual admissions policies is either a pragmatic exercise (dealing with the situation in which the school finds itself), or a reaction to ‘political’ pressures, rather than being based on theological or ecclesiological reflection;
4. CE policy as enunciated in the ‘Dearing Report’, is based on arguments that are poorly conceived, lacking in clarity, and which owe more to political correctness than to any coherent theological or ecclesiological thinking;
5. the CE has changed what has been at least an implicit policy: a ‘twin focus’ within the system, to a ‘twin focus’ within each individual school;
6. there is only a single defensible rationale for Faith Schools in general and CE schools in particular; that is the ‘nurture’ model.

It should be noted that I do not approach this study as a totally impartial observer, although it has been my intention throughout to focus on advancing the argumentation, whether or not those arguments supported the view I have, over the years, come to hold. Indeed, it will be noted that, particularly post-‘Dearing’, I virtually became a participant in my own research.

I am a priest of the Church of England, and although I have worked in education throughout my career, I have also been involved as honorary assistant priest in two parishes, in total for almost 25 years. As a part of my parochial responsibilities I have prepared parents and godparents for the baptism of their children. That experience has

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<sup>2</sup> The subject of a number of other research projects e.g. Lankshear J F (1999) *‘Quality and Diversity in Anglican Primary Schools’*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wales, relied on published inspection reports.

caused me to reflect on the nature and purpose of Christian baptism, particularly when the baptismal rite is requested by families who would not claim to be practising Christians. I have also been the Head of two Church of England secondary schools. The first of those (William Temple – now Archbishop Temple<sup>3</sup> - School; 1983-1988) might have been considered almost a classic ‘twin focus’ school,<sup>4</sup> with aspects of the ‘Weak Domestic 3’ model as well. The reason for the lack of clear definition is that this church school actually had, in the 1980s, very few Christian children attending. In those days it was operated, to all intents and purposes, as a community catchment area school, which happened to draw some 40% of its pupils, almost equally divided in number, from the local Hindu and Muslim communities. It therefore had a religious intake, although that intake did not include (then) many committed Christian families. I had six years experience in this CE multi-Faith school, with large numbers of children with no active religious background. In 1989 I moved to the Headship of Canon Slade School in Bolton, which was then, and even more strongly now, what I have termed the ‘Moderate Domestic 2’ model.

As the Head of a CE secondary school, as well as one who served for 15 years (1985 – 2000) on the CE’s national Schools Committee, and many other related national and diocesan committees, I had not only a particular interest in working out for myself the role and purpose of CE VA secondary schools, but having been invited to contribute to the deliberations of the Church Schools Review Group (which produced the Dearing Report), I developed a particular view of its deliberations and outcome. Work on this thesis began in 1997, and so inevitably became caught up in the political-ecclesiastical processes which have led the CE to pledge to build 100 new secondary schools, virtually doubling the present number (if one counts just VA secondary schools). My contention is that this pledge has been made with little or no considered rationale. That, for both national and church life, is a serious matter. Confusion about the purpose of CE schools (and hence

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<sup>3</sup> The name was formally changed because of constant questions asking: ‘Just who is/was William Temple?’

<sup>4</sup> All definitions are explained in Chapter 6 below.

‘faith schools’ in general) is likely to create problems for future policy makers, for the church itself, and most of all, for parents who wonder why, if the CE leadership claims that their schools are open to children of ‘all Faiths and of none’, they cannot gain a place for their son or daughter. This research shows that whatever CE officials believe to be the purpose of CE schools, Heads and Governors hold a different view and, at the moment at least, it is the Governing Body which is responsible for the school’s admissions policy.

Finally, the clarification of some basic terminology might be helpful. The distinction between theology and ecclesiology is more technical than fundamental. The latter is a ‘subset’ of the former. We may describe the whole of a Faith’s reflection on the things of God as ‘theology’ (‘God-talk’), and Christian theology will obviously include thinking about Christian belief, life, ethics, and worship. ‘Ecclesiology’ refers more specifically to the study of the church (the ‘*ekklesia*’) itself. It is also important to distinguish between the Anglican Church (or Anglican Communion) and the Church of England. The former term denotes all those churches in communion with, and recognising the leadership of, the Archbishop of Canterbury. That now consists of around 40 churches or provinces worldwide. Ecclesiologically

Anglicanism is a notable form of Christianity which was spread around the globe by a colonising power and whose inherited public formularies were shaped at a high point of imperial conceptions of politics and social life in England in the sixteenth century. Yet the global Anglican community lacks any sense of a long-standing universal structure or high-level coherence as to its global identity.<sup>5</sup>

We shall see that the foundational Church of England is experiencing a similar identity crisis.

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<sup>5</sup> Kaye B (2003) p. 7.

The thesis is set out as follows:

Chapter 1 applies the insights of sociology and cultural theory to the Church of England as it is today, and offers a foundation for ecclesiological enquiry.

Chapter 2 considers both whether the Anglican Church can be said to have its own ecclesiology, and examines the meaning of membership; it explores two contrasting ecclesiological models for the Church of England and questions the nature of the mission of the Church of England.

Chapter 3 charts the historical role of the Church of England in education and surveys the Church of England's present involvement in school-based education.

Chapter 4 provides a critical but focused review of the main body of literature relating CE VA secondary schools, a number of which bear the 'imprimatur', both formal and informal, of the church.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between an admissions policy and the school's ethos, in particular how the former affects the latter and so elucidates the purpose of the school. It will be argued that an understanding of a school's ethos is central to understanding how the school sees its role and recognises the nature of its community (geographical or otherwise). The chapter will also examine how admissions policies are designed and implemented.

Chapter 6 considers issues relating to research methodologies, and outlines the results of field research.

Chapter 7 will specifically consider the Dearing Report of June 2001 and its aftermath.



Chapter 8 seeks to provide a rationale for CE/'Faith' schools. We shall finally consider, in the light of this ecclesiological exploration, how the question 'Who are church schools for?' might be answered.

Finally, Chapter 9 proposes what the model of the 'nurture' school could look like, with particular reference given to different types of Faith school, and a discussion of the potential for tension between education and nurture, in the concept of Christian education. It also considers the possibility, and implications, of a more nuanced ecclesiological voice.



## **Chapter 1: A Sociological and Cultural Analysis of the Church of England.**

For some, theology (and so ecclesiology) and sociology do not make good bedfellows. Some Christians believe that valid comment on the church can come only from within the Christian community itself, and that because ecclesiology is an activity that arises from faith and commitment, it must be based purely on the sources of faith: the Bible, the traditions of the church, and so on. For them the church is a divine construction, not open to the judgement of 'the world'. Such has been the traditional view of the Roman Catholic church, which sees the whole of history as a working out of the divine purposes, in which cultural and social factors are merely contingent. On this view secular analysis is inevitably relativistic and reductionist, and not able to provide any ideologically neutral 'tools' to aid the ecclesiological task. However, the days are long past when theology was regarded as the 'queen of the sciences', and so intellectually inviolable. Any theological enterprise which ignores the insights of other disciplines will inevitably be narrow and limited in scope, and will lose an important dimension to its analysis. The church, apart from its (allegedly) divine origin, is still fundamentally a human institution affected (to a greater or lesser extent) by political, social, cultural and economic factors, and as such can reasonably be studied as any other complex social organisation. Religion is socially organised and has its own institutions, of which the Church of England is just one example.

The classic sociologists of religion took a 'broad canvas' approach to their discipline. Their theories concerned total societies and wide historical sweeps, although the worlds which the early theorists studied did not divide the natural and supernatural into separate spheres to the extent they do today. Fundamental was the notion that religious bodies may be classified in terms of their relationship to society at large. Max Weber initiated the debate in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) out of which grew the so-

called 'church-sect' typology, strongly defended by Troeltsch<sup>1</sup> and Niebuhr.<sup>2</sup> Building on the basic typology, J Milton Yinger<sup>3</sup> developed a continuum ranging from the exclusive 'cult', through the 'sect', the 'institutionalised sect', the 'denomination', the 'ecclesia', to the 'universal church'. The boundaries are fluid, and each type informs the other.

According to Weber, those who wish to study society have only two alternatives:

The only choice is often between a terminology which is not clear at all and one which is clear but unrealistic, an 'ideal type'. In this situation, the latter sort of terminology is scientifically preferable.<sup>4</sup>

The various models are 'ideal'; no one organisation will fit the type exactly. Unlike in the natural sciences, it is difficult to conduct experiments on people and social groups; the very act of studying social groups can change how they behave. So the ideal type is a model that contains the features of a number of real types, and as such is a conceptual tool which helps sociologists make sense of complex issues. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with some notable exceptions (such as Parsons<sup>5</sup> and Stark and Bainbridge<sup>6</sup>) sociologists tended to theorise on the micro or middle ranges rather than on whole society levels. This tendency led to an emphasis on the study of what Luckmann has described as "church-oriented religiosity."<sup>7</sup> Linked with this has been the increasing interest in the process of secularisation, "typically regarded as a process of religious pathology to be measured by the shrinking reach of the churches."<sup>8</sup> Since the 1970s sociologists of religion have become particularly interested in the development of the cult-type into what are now generally called new religious movements. Of particular relevance to this study are the 'ecclesia' and 'denominational' models. Our question is this: is the Church of England, once generally

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<sup>1</sup> Troeltsch E (1931/1976).

<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr HR (1962).

<sup>3</sup> Yinger JM (1957).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Runciman WG (1978) p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Parsons T (1964).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Stark R & Bainbridge W (1985).

<sup>7</sup> Luckmann T (1970) p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

regarded as a 'church' type, now a 'denomination' type? If so, what are the implications, generally for its mission, and more specifically for its involvement in education, where church schools are becoming an increasingly contentious political and religious battle ground?

At one end of the continuum, the universal church is all-embracing. It transcends both national and social boundaries, in some times and places taking in whole populations, and providing for both social and personal needs. The western catholic church up to the time of the Reformation is a classic example ('catholic' means 'universal'). The church saw itself as co-extensive with society; it offered its ministries to all members of society, whether they wanted them or not. It was closely tied to the prevailing structure of society, and was often allied with the political hierarchy. People were born into the church just as they were born into a nation. As far as the individual was concerned, they had as much chance of renouncing their religion as they would their homeland, and the likelihood of the thought occurring to them was just as remote. In such a society attendance at important religious rituals was usually compulsory, but overall membership was hardly demanding:

While the professional clergy might have to live a distinctive mode of life entailing purity and devotion, the church made relatively few demands on the ordinary members beyond periodic attendance, financial support and verbal commitment to its creed.<sup>9</sup>

The Reformation itself, being the break-up of this universalism in Western Europe, produced the ecclesia (church) type. For Bainbridge this type was "the cornerstone of the sociology of religion".<sup>10</sup> Like the catholic model, the church type tries to be inclusive and integrative, but lacks the breadth to transcend divisions within a society. Indeed, it tends to focus on particular groups within society, most often the dominant groups, and so fails to provide a mechanism to meet the religious needs of all. A good example of this is the

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce S (1996) p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Bainbridge WS (1997) p. 38.



Church of England's alliance with the 17th and 18th Century 'squirearchy', and its lack of engagement with the new urban centres, which it left open to Methodism and other forms of Dissent. Although the Church of England sought to claim the allegiance of the whole of society, and was thoroughly integrated within the mainstream culture, it was not in any sense universal:

...it was structurally and religious-culturally unable to comprehend the sectarian tendencies within its constituency. As long as political sanctions against religious deviance were firmly upheld widespread support for sectarian bodies was not forthcoming, but from 1689 onwards English society moved gradually towards a de facto religious voluntarism. The result was the rise of dynamic sect type religious organisations outside the Establishment, and the consequent erosion of its inclusive, monopolistic pretensions.<sup>11</sup>

The problem is easily described: when all, or even almost all, the people belong to one religious organisation within a nation, it can both think and act like a church. However, when the population becomes fragmented between a number of religious groupings then the church-type is inevitably undermined: the State must become, or at least move towards becoming, more neutral and even-handed in its relationship to all religious groups. The USA achieved this early on with its separation of church and state and the guarantee of religious liberty. Great Britain has found the transition much more difficult, not least due to the special relationship between the monarch and the Church of England. Nevertheless, amid the frequent cries for Disestablishment, the long-awaited reorganisation of the House of Lords is likely to provide greater religious balance within Parliament (the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords, chaired by Lord Wakeham, recommended that the number of religious seats be increased from 26 to 31, but with a reduction in the number of Anglican Bishops), and (on a more mundane level) the Church of England has long waived its privileges in monopolising religious broadcasting. As tolerance increases, so absolute certainty decreases, resulting in the move to a

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<sup>11</sup> Gilbert AD (1976) pp. 139-140.

denominationalism, in which the strengths and contributions of all are (at least to some extent) recognised.

Denominationalism flourished in Europe after the Reformation, but still tended to have some church-type features such as professional clergy. Today there are very few countries that have one single religious organisation as the mouthpiece for all religious beliefs. The denomination differs from the church-type (although for some, such as Bainbridge, it is a subset of the church-type) in that it is recognisably a non-inclusive body: membership is not assumed for anyone, although you may believe that you have been born into it. But neither is it exclusive (as the sect-type is), because anyone can join who wishes to do so. Denominations make more modest claims than established churches or sects, and are fairly tolerant of religious beliefs and of other denominations. The denomination is relatively undemanding and there are no great tests to 'pass' before one is admitted. This may be illustrated by direct reference to the Anglican Church:

To be a bad Anglican is the easiest thing in the world; the amount of effort required in minimum Anglican conformity is so infinitesimal that it is hardly to be measured....[But] to be a good Anglican is an exceedingly exacting business.<sup>12</sup>

This is a crucial point because one issue on which the Church of England shows differing practice is the nature of the 'requirement' (if any) placed on a family before a child is baptised. However, the denomination

differs from both sect and church in one particularly important respect - namely, that both the sect and the church think they have a monopoly on the truth....The denomination does not claim such exclusive access to the truth that saves. Rather it says that it has a particularly clear vision of the Christian message and its purest organisational form but allows that there are other religious bodies which also have much of the truth.....*the historic churches have...become more denominational.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Neill S (1958) p. 423.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce S (1996) pp. 75 - 76; my italics.

The sect-type and the cult-type were radical alternatives to the church-type, and occupy a position many steps further than the denomination from the universal church type, being exclusive in both social structure and attitudes. The rise of individualism, and the increase in religious toleration, provided a context in which sect-type groups could recruit and grow. The privatisation of religion meant that, in individual conscience, any group could be as valid as any other; and who was anyone to say otherwise?

It should not be thought that these different sociological types occurred in strict chronological order, or that movement is only in one direction. Groups which opposed the universal church were often viewed, and viewed themselves, as having taken on the identity of what we would now call a sect. In contradistinction to this, the work of H R Niebuhr showed how what began its life as a radical sect, can evolve into a fairly conservative denomination. Bruce argues that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century virtually all the old church- and sect-types have become denominations.<sup>14</sup> For the older churches the problem is not so much the growth of religious diversity, but “economic misfortune” which is causing them to “rethink their mission”.<sup>15</sup>

While Troeltsch’s analysis set in high relief the distinctive features of churches, sects and cults, his evidence was largely drawn from European medieval sect formation, and is thus limited in value. Wilson<sup>16</sup> has warned how the ideal type can produce an artificial sense of timelessness, and many scholars have found the Weber-Troeltsch typology too simplistic to classify English religion in modern times because society has become much more complex and pluralistic. Both the church type and some of the sect types have become denominational in a society in which different cultures intermix. In Gilbert’s view the crucial period of change was the mid-19th Century when the Church of England “moved

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce S (1995) p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson B (1982).



significantly towards a typically denominational solution to its intolerable situation as an ex-monopolistic institution in a pluralistic society.”<sup>17</sup> The denomination type is seen not to comprehend society as a whole, nor to withdraw from it; rather it accommodates itself to, or compromises with, a particular group or groups in a pluralistic society. So it sees itself simply as one valid option among many (or more negatively, may actually see itself in competition with other churches<sup>18</sup>). Institutional weakness is to be found when the denomination

...concedes that its virtues can be found not only in other religions but even in secular beliefs and actions...[that] removes the incentives to socialise the next generation.....[and it also] offers little to the unchurched....<sup>19</sup>

However, while “the process of religious-cultural and organisational evolution from sect to denomination is a much explored theme in the sociology of religion...the corresponding process of evolution from church to denomination has received less attention,”<sup>20</sup> and it is here that the debate about church schools must be located, because this is where the Church of England now finds itself,<sup>21</sup> despite the continuation of some ‘church-type’ characteristics in Establishment. The point is made sharply by the historian David Nicholls:

....Arnold’s vision of Britain as a public school writ large - a total community in which the church is simply the nation seen from a particular angle - is untenable today. Yet there are still those in England who seem to think of the church as a total community, and omni-competent body.

Nicholls goes on to comment on the specific view that the Church of England has an obligation towards everyone in the country:

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<sup>17</sup> *Op cit*, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> Niebuhr HR (1962) *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce S (1995) p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert (1976) p. 141.

<sup>21</sup> *Pace* Thompson KA (1970) where it is argued that the CE still seems nearer to the ‘ecclesiatype’, pp. 217 – 218.

The twentieth-century church cannot be expected to attend to people in all their areas of need, nor can its officials expect a place of pre-eminence in spheres where secular studies have advanced far beyond the point that ecclesiastics can reach. The church's concern is, in this sense, a limited one: its business is religion, by which I mean that it is concerned with the ultimate purpose and significance of life.<sup>22</sup>

Bishops are still in the House of Lords (although so, increasingly, are other religious leaders, if not through the entitlement of their position); the church is still an important partner in the education service; various other Boards (e.g. Social Responsibility) comment on their areas of particular interest. But there are clearly areas such as health care, where the Church of England has little or no competence and/or influence. Those things “concerned with the ultimate purpose and significance of life,” will include providing a ceremonial for the rites of passage, certainly, but does the CE do and mean much more in 21<sup>st</sup> Century England?

The above analysis has focused on institutional religion, but formal institutions such as churches have no monopoly on religion. Many people have lived religious lives without any dependence on formal religion, and the religious and the spiritual are not synonymous. The former connotes some kind of identity (a binding together), which may be linked to a particular leader or founder, and with various rites and practices; while the latter connotes more of an inward and personal development. Sociologists, therefore, have identified three other social functions for religion:

1. intellectual: the influence of beliefs on the individual and in society;
2. functional: Christianity's role in civil society;
3. diffusive: how Christianity and Christian ideas affect people's lives.

Wolffe argues that as particular religious institutions have lost influence in the 20th Century, so “general religion continued to influence the lives of a substantial majority of

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<sup>22</sup> Nicholls D (1967) p. 23.



the (British) population”,<sup>23</sup> while recognising that “it would be unwise to place too much stress on any single survey or investigation”.<sup>24</sup> Tracing the beginnings of such analysis to the work of Luckmann in the 1960s,<sup>25</sup> ‘invisible’ religion, sometimes termed ‘implicit’ or ‘folk’ religion, has been a more active interest of sociologists of religion since then. Wolffe defines his terms carefully: allegiance to a particular institutional religion he terms ‘conventional’; he then distinguishes between ‘civil’ religion (the use of religious ceremonies in public life), ‘common’ religion (some kind of belief in the supernatural) and ‘invisible’ religion (no supernatural reference, but relates “to people’s perception of their place in the cosmos or.....a kind of collective activity that inspires intense commitment”).<sup>26</sup>

There are obviously many people, and not just those who would consider themselves, however minimally, to be Christian, who appreciate the role of religion in the state. This is, both historically and practically, where the Church of England comes into its own. One has only to consider the immense public interest in the great ceremonial occasions held in a religious context, the most poignant in recent years being the funeral of the Princess of Wales, whose death sparked off a remarkable fervour. Public holidays still broadly revolve around holy days, and Wolffe points further to the popularity of TV religion and the common use of Christian inferences and references in public life. Aspects of the Christian tradition are still to be found within the culture of the country, although any “signs of residual religiosity reveal much more about the force of tradition than about the beliefs of participants.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Wolffe J ‘The Religions of the Silent Majority’ in G Parsons (ed) (1993) p. 308.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 309.

<sup>25</sup> Luckmann T (1970).

<sup>26</sup> Parsons (1993) pp. 309 – 310.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 321.

The category of 'common' religion covers any kind of supernatural belief, although even the committed Christian may be superstitious.<sup>28</sup> Modern expressions include the use of Christian ceremonies for rites of passage, and the way many churches are unusually full over Christmas<sup>29</sup> and on such diverse occasions as Mothering Sunday (now the secular Mothers' Day) and Harvest (drawing on the vestiges of rural life). Folk religion includes belief in prayer, in life after death (often reincarnation)<sup>30</sup> and in 'some kind of God'. Such beliefs are often inarticulate and incoherent. As Wolffe rightly comments: "such themes in common religion lacked much theological content and certainly did not represent an overall interlinked system of ideas."<sup>31</sup> Another factor is the identification of religion with morality. Wolffe points to this in his analysis of monarchs' Christmas messages since the war,<sup>32</sup> and it is represented by the view that 'you don't need to go to church to be a Christian; you just need to live a good life'.

Wolffe concludes his analysis with an account of 'invisible' (or 'surrogate') religion. Focusing on the work of Luckman and Bailey, he describes some of the ways in which people ascribe meaning to their lives in a search for personal identity. These ways may indeed involve "points of contact with conventional religion,"<sup>33</sup> and claims to be Christian/CE (etc.), because that is seen to be part of a tradition which people own. Researchers such as Bailey take a very broad view of such 'religious' activity, embracing the 'religiosity' of the countryside, the sea, the football match and the local pub. While the emphasis is on individual beliefs and values (Bailey argues that institutional religion may put people off simply because they believe it violates their autonomy), there are connections with groups who share those beliefs and values. Such religious activity is at least a recognition of the spiritual dimension of life to which the church should respond:

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<sup>28</sup> Research, quoted by Wolffe, suggests that they are less so: *ibid* p. 330.

<sup>29</sup> Theological priorities notwithstanding, Christmas clearly has more popular appeal than Easter.

<sup>30</sup> Waterhouse & Walter (2003).

<sup>31</sup> Parsons (1993) p. 329.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 319.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 335.

We cannot condescendingly dismiss ‘mere folk religion’ and then go on to complain that ‘children today don’t know the first thing about the Bible’. Obviously the vague, half-formed ideas people have about our faith do not make them into anything resembling committed Christians. But it is ground in which seeds of the real thing might one day take root and grow....<sup>34</sup>

It may therefore be argued that the concept of ‘general religion’ i.e. being religious in a general sense, is tenable. However, if those who are religious in a general sense express that religion in Christian terminology, does that make them Christian? Even though one might be generally religious, can one be generally Christian? Wolffe quotes Archbishop Habgood with approbation: “religion, including the Christian religion, is a much more complicated phenomenon than any simple distinction between believers and non-believers will allow.”<sup>35</sup> That may indeed be so, but the danger is that the term ‘Christian’ is defined so loosely that it loses all meaning. Anyone is a Christian who so designates herself. A short step from this is the view that everyone is a Christian (in some sense) whether they know it or not. Of course, it must be admitted that affiliation to a church is not in itself a measure of religiosity:

Membership (of a church) need not connote a commitment to religion. It may take a status claim or serve as a vehicle for mobility...It may be a prerequisite for something as basic as credit or a job...Or it may simply represent a penchant for formal associations. In fact, it can be argued that the churches have sought to capitalise upon all of these motives.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that people may attend church for a variety of reasons, there is at least some recognition to be given to voluntary commitment as differentiating them from those who do not attend at all.

Grace Davie argues that a failure to attend church is not in itself an indication of a lack of faith, that modern Britain is “unchurched rather than simply secular”,<sup>37</sup> and that there is a

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<sup>34</sup> Hall C (1993) ‘A Church within a Nation’, *Churchman* Vol. 107, No. 4, p. 326.

<sup>35</sup> Parsons (1993) p. 342.

<sup>36</sup> Demarath N J (1965) pp. 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Davie G (1994) pp. 12–13.



significant disjunction between religious belief and religious practice across the whole of Western Europe. This distinction is maintained specifically between religious (Christian) belief and belonging to a church (although she also claims that there seems to be less desire within British society to belong to anything much at all<sup>38</sup>). She identifies the major period of change as dating from the end of the “Anglican decade”: the 1950s, when “the sacred (at least in its Anglican forms) synchronised nicely with the secular...It was not to last.”<sup>39</sup> Before around 1960 there had been no significant statistical change in the church-going habits of the English people since towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. From then, however

Traditional, often Christian-based, values...were no longer taken for granted; questioned by many, they were abandoned by increasing numbers.<sup>40</sup>

One aspect of a growing indifference towards organised religion was a general and increasing decline in the numbers attending churches (possibly by as much as 50% in the 25 years after 1960, although slowing down from the mid-80s), and so an increase in nominalism (which, she contends, is a more “prevalent phenomenon than secularism”<sup>41</sup>).

However, argues Davie, “nominal allegiance...is by no means the same as no allegiance at all,” which, she claims, is moderately rare. The Church of England is simply “the church from which the English choose to stay away”! <sup>42</sup> (or as Bruce equally pithily puts it: “the main reason for leaving the Church of England....is death, not displeasure.”<sup>43</sup>) It is the parochial system which “continues to give the Church of England a unique foothold in English society”,<sup>44</sup> and which, together with Establishment, means that “latent or nominal Anglicanism persists as the most common form of English religiosity. Common or folk religion normally takes Anglican forms and the occasional offices of the state church

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 31 – 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce (1995) p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Davie (1994) p. 55.

continue to play an important part in the lives of individuals and communities.”<sup>45</sup> So “believing without belonging” is the “persistent theme.”<sup>46</sup>

Davie considers a number of terms which seek to express this concept and prefers “common religion”, which describes the “less orthodox dimensions of individual believing”.<sup>47</sup> It recognises that even ‘private’ religion has some basis in a corporate Faith, but that those who do not practice corporately are so distanced from the teachings of the community, that they will inevitably develop more heterodox beliefs. Another aspect of this common religion is the persistence of “Christian assumptions and Christian vocabulary”.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century “the British were by a considerable majority a believing people,”<sup>48</sup> but that changed radically in the second half of the century. Davie cites studies which suggest that among non-practising people, much belief is mere superstition, with occasional forays into practice being limited to celebrating rites of passage. She specifically cites baptism as the activity “which reveals among other things the very ambivalent nature of the relationship between common religion and orthodox Christianity”,<sup>49</sup> although funerals continue to be the greatest point of contact between church and people. This sets the scene for her contention that

....the terms ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ are not to be considered too rigidly. The disjunction between the variables is intended to capture a mood, to suggest an area of enquiry, a way of looking at the problem, not to describe a detailed set of characteristics.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 74ff.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

Significant factors are geographical, social and economic. She, understandably, finds the discrepancy between believing and belonging at its sharpest in the inner city, and among the urban working classes. Here, as she notes, the phenomenon is hardly new. Historically the urban centres have been least touched by the Church of England. What she sees as more significant is the way that religious belief in such areas has nevertheless “been able to maintain itself despite a prolonged divorce from institutional Christianity.”<sup>51</sup> She contrasts a higher social (and educational) class, where there would appear to be a greater degree of interest in expressing religious beliefs in some institutional setting and practice, with the perceived view of working class folk (suggested by Hoggart) that churchgoing is unnecessary and even hypocritical! She refers to research carried out in Cornwall, where regular church attendance was seen to be acceptable for children (particularly for girls), but “over the top” for adults,<sup>52</sup> and “it appears that more and more people within British society want to believe but do not want to involve themselves in religious practice.”<sup>53</sup> She refrains from making any detailed comments on that, although she does express the view that “traditional working-class modes of religious behaviour may be different, but they are just as valid as middle-class ones”.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, she does not attempt to justify that judgement.

Elsewhere<sup>55</sup> Davie has focused on the problem of a church membership which “means different things for different people”.<sup>56</sup> Membership is, in her view, to be distinguished from practice: it does not require engaging in particular activities (like attending church). So she traces a “methodological shift” in religious variables: “nominal attachment” or a “passive attachment” has taken the place of “active participation”.<sup>57</sup> In this respect the

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Christian Belief in Modern Britain: the Tradition Becomes Vicarious’, in Platten et al (eds) (1997) pp. 92 – 117.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97.



Church of England has the greatest degree of nominal allegiance, and its nominal membership outweighs its active membership. On the whole, Davie argues, the evidence suggests that active membership is restricted to “a group that is prospering, demographically speaking, in modern Western Europe”: older women. She foresees that nominal allegiance and faltering belief will ultimately give way to no allegiance and no belief at all. However, this will not be the end for religions; rather religion itself must be redefined

....to include questions about individual and social health, about the purpose of existence, the future of the planet and the responsibilities of humanity both to fellow humans and to the earth itself.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever that ‘religion’ is, it will probably bear little resemblance to the Church of England in its present form.

Theologically there is no overriding necessity for a religious believer to link with any particular institutional form of religion, and there are religions where little emphasis is given to engaging in any specific practices. However, the Christian Faith is essentially a corporate religion. Stress is placed on being a member of the Body of Christ.<sup>59</sup> It is my contention that the communal aspect of Christianity is no optional extra. What may be a genuine spirituality is not necessarily authentic Christianity. So is ‘believing without belonging’, as useful as it may be sociologically, an acceptable theological position? For the Chairman of the Church of England Doctrine Commission: “believing is mainly belonging”,<sup>60</sup> and Basil Mitchell claimed in the same volume that “to belong to a church is to believe what the church believes”.<sup>61</sup> On the one hand the importance of belonging is stressed, on the other the emphasis is on believing “*what the church believes*”. That is far from an ‘anything goes’ position.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. *1 Corinthians* 12:12 ff.

<sup>60</sup> Doctrine Commission (1981) p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

What Davie has been describing as ‘being unchurched’ has been seen by other sociologists as the process of secularisation. Based broadly on an institutional model of religion – the church and its membership – theories of secularisation have claimed that Christianity has, over the past 250 years, fallen victim to two factors: industrialisation and the alienation of the working classes. The onset of modernity – specifically science and rationality - has led to the demise of traditional forms of religious life, so that religion itself is in terminal decline.

For many commentators the beginning of the end came with the Reformation, with its emphasis on individualism and rationality. As Bruce noted:

Individualism threatened the communal basis of religious belief and behaviour, while rationality removed many of the purposes of religion and rendered many of its beliefs implausible.<sup>62</sup>

In pre-Reformation Europe great emphasis was laid on the role of the priest as mediator between God and the people. It was customary to pay the priest to say Mass for a loved one (living or dead); you got on with your daily life (which was far too busy, and perched on the edge of survival to allow you the ‘luxury’ of prayer) and he would look after your soul, on your behalf. This kind of vicarious thinking was destroyed by the Reformers’ emphasis on the personal relationship with God of each Christian (the priesthood of all believers), and the lack of need for any other intercessor than Christ himself. So Latin (the universal language of the church) was replaced by the vernacular, hymns were set to folk melodies that enabled the ordinary worshipper to join in, the Bible was translated so that people could read it for themselves, and the importance of personal belief and personal commitment was stressed.

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<sup>62</sup> Bruce S (1996) p. 230.



While an emphasis on rationality has seen many doctrines, previously taken for granted, being questioned, one outcome of individualism has not only been the growth of new religions and 'New Age' religious experiments, but in a modern consumer society, religion has become just another focus of individual choice: 'what works for me' is all that matters. Issues of truth, responsibility and duty become relative rather than absolute; individual preference is the god. Many people today would see it as an affront, and an invasion of their privacy, to be told (for example) that they were not meeting their religious obligations, or were not conducting their lives in tune with the Faith they confessed. Indeed, there are many who would not recognise any connection at all between their religious life and their daily life. Where there is the 'priesthood of all believers' then ultimately everyone is their own arbiter of what is right and wrong in their life of faith, even to the point of claiming that it is perfectly alright to claim allegiance to a Faith without practising it. Theologically, we might say that the parts become more important than the Body; that, as St Paul predicted, would spell ruin for the church.<sup>63</sup> As a result the church becomes a denomination, while the sect becomes more cult-like. The over-arching structure provided by the universal church disappears. Religion becomes less public and more private: 'what I believe' is more important than 'what we believe'.

The secularisation thesis has been embraced by many, although some have noted that it does not fit all the facts (what of American Evangelicalism?). So some have argued that only traditional forms of religiosity have declined, but other forms, such as New Age movements, are persistent and buoyant. Indeed, the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw considerable division among British sociologists of religion. Gill has traced the disagreements between Wilson and Martin in the 1960s through to arguments between Bruce and Davie in the 90s.<sup>64</sup> For Wilson, secularisation was "the process whereby

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<sup>63</sup> *1 Corinthians* 12: 14 – 26.

<sup>64</sup> Gill R (1999) Chapter 3, *passim*.

religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance,”<sup>65</sup> and he seemed to believe that the process of decline was inevitable. Gill argues that Wilson’s

....seminal analysis....when compared with recent studies....shows both how the debate about secularisation has changed over the years and just how resistant senior parts of the Church of England are to some forms of sociological analysis. More to the point, there is evidence that parts of the Church of England (perhaps like churches elsewhere) are capable of very selective reading when confronted with distressing ‘evidence’.<sup>66</sup>

Even in the light of evident decline in most forms of religious practice and the rejection (implicit if not explicit) of central Christian beliefs, this reluctance to face facts may be seen to lie at the heart of the CE’s failure to provide a realistic rationale for its church schools. Indeed, post-Dearing, it is seeking to use an inclusivist policy to bolster an anachronistic ecclesiology.

Bruce, in contrast to Davie, sees the prospects for religion as poor. He traces back the particular decline of Christianity at least 150 years. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, church attendance dropped from almost 30% of the population to around 10%. In the same period the number of children attending Sunday Schools fell from 55% of the population to just 4%. The number of full-time clergy dropped by 25%. Furthermore, not only are those who attend religious services predominantly from the older groups, but there is little evidence that they will be replaced. However, his diagnosis of the problem is not that modernity has washed away irrationality and superstition – far from it! Rather other processes have been at work: social life has become fragmented, and religious institutions have lost their role in society. Modernisation is also characterised by the shift of social organisation from the local to the national level – ‘community’ has been replaced by ‘society’, and what Durkheim styled a “collective conscience” has been lost. Religion is no longer a given, but has become one choice amongst many. Society is organised more and more on the basis of

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<sup>65</sup> Wilson B (1966) p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> Gill R (2002) p. 88.

routines, procedures, predictability and order. The growing prestige of science has undermined the status of religious explanations of life. The role of religion in education has been greatly reduced, and specialised bureaucracies provide welfare and social control.

Casanova<sup>67</sup> broadly accepted the secularisation thesis, although he argued for greater clarity in using the concept, believing that it is not simply an inevitable aspect of modernisation, and he offered a tripartite definition which would enable greater accuracy of analysis. He identified the main trend as “secularisation as differentiation” i.e. the “differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms....”<sup>68</sup> However, this did not necessarily mean a lessening of belief and practice, nor did it entail the privatisation of religion. He noted that in certain places religious resurgence – often of a fundamentalist kind – was as much in evidence as decline elsewhere. One common feature of modernity seemed to be the process of separation between church and state, and that religious decline was more pronounced in countries which have resisted disestablishment. England is obviously a case in point. A somewhat different approach was taken by Daniele Hervieu-Leger,<sup>69</sup> who developed the idea of religion as collective memory: the traditions of the religious community which bind members – past, present and future – together. The problem for modern churches is not so much rationality, but a loss of collective memory, as modernism corrodes the old traditions.

Among sociologists who dispute the secularisation thesis is Rodney Stark.<sup>70</sup> He strongly disputes the claim of Bruce et al that the Middle Ages was the ‘age of faith’, in which religion was dominant, everyone believed in God and went to church. He argues that the historical record shows widespread indifference to religion among the general population.

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<sup>67</sup> Casanova J (1994).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 212.

<sup>69</sup> Hervieu-Leger D (2000).

<sup>70</sup> Stark R (1999).



When they did go to church, they did so unwillingly. So, according to Stark, there has been no modern decline in religiosity, because it was never particularly high in the first place. Furthermore, he points to evidence which suggest that in the modern world, religion is actually flourishing, such as in the USA.

Using cultural theory rather than the traditional sociological approach, Callum Brown has argued that sociologists have broadly missed the point, and although he shares Davie's lack of conviction for the secularisation thesis as classically argued, both (now) agree that religious decline is real enough. However, adherence to religion cannot simply be judged on the basis of attendance; it is a much more complex phenomenon. Brown's analysis is a sharp reminder that the Christian churches have no cause for complacency:

It is not especially novel to proclaim that the Christian churches are in decline in Britain. But what is new is the idea of the death of Christian Britain.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, such a death is not simply signalled by the usual indices: falling church attendances, baptisms, weddings etc., but by a more profound phenomenon: the “demise of the nation's core religious and moral identity”;<sup>72</sup> the means by which people “construct their identities and their sense of ‘self’”.<sup>73</sup> This, argues Brown, is a “sudden plunge into a truly secular condition.”<sup>74</sup>

Contrary to the more ‘orthodox’ thesis that secularisation came with the industrial revolution and has been a long slow ‘creeping’ process, Brown finds that the decline and fall has been relatively recent – since the 1960s – and it is devastating in its scale. He affirms Brierley's “warning” that “declining popular support will cause some

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<sup>71</sup> Brown CG (2001) p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

denominations to disappear during this century.”<sup>75</sup> But it is not simply about denominational strength or weakness; it is about the essential Christian basis of British society. While in the 1950s people’s lives were “very acutely affected by genuflection to religious symbols, authority and activities [and] religion mattered deeply,”<sup>76</sup> it matters no longer to the vast majority of ‘Christian’ Britons. This is more than a failure on the part of the churches to attract people to their worship – it is “more elemental”; it is to do with changes in morality and culture:

The point is that the complex web of legally and socially accepted rules which governed individual identity in Christian Britain until the 1950s has been swept aside....<sup>77</sup>

We noted above the four classic roles of religion in society. To these Brown adds a fifth: discursivity, which undergirds the others. It is the ‘subscription’ to religion which “creates a compelling religious culture” and so a ‘religious society’. For Christianity to have any social significance,

...for it to achieve popular participation, support or even acquiescence...it must have a base of discursivity. Otherwise it is inconceivable.<sup>78</sup>

It is this that has now gone. The bulk of religious observance, such as it is, is no longer interiorised. Rather, in most cases, there is no ‘subscription’ to anything much at all. There has been a “discourse change”:<sup>79</sup> not only a decline in religious practice, but a decline in faith itself: neither belonging nor believing. And despite the best efforts of the churches they

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181.

....have had little success in putting the Christian back into British public morality...[so] since the 1960s, the churches have become increasingly irrelevant in the new cultural and ethical landscape.<sup>80</sup>

Many will share Brown's view that "there is no pleasure in proclaiming the death of Christian Britain,"<sup>81</sup> yet to deny the demise of, at least, the mainstream churches would simply be foolish. And yet that is what the Church of England seems to be doing, as it proclaims its determination to increase by 100 the number of secondary schools it proposes to run for the general population. This is a church which still sees itself as the Church of the Nation. It is interesting to note that Brown actually comments implicitly on what he supposes to be the role of church schools. In the context of imagining the "'endgame' of Christian decline in Britain," he wonders whether "church schools are going to be needed for much longer."<sup>82</sup> Church schools, he seems to believe, are only needed when there is a Christian population to serve. He also suggests that the motivation for the church itself in holding onto its view that it is the church for all is "related to a fear of loss of power":

At national level.....the Church of England has enjoyed privileged positions in the House of Lords and in influencing policy on a wide range of issues.<sup>83</sup>

Recognition of its true situation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is bound to lead to a loss of influence in the country. When I suggested, at a debate on church school admissions policies held at the Bluecoat School, Oldham,<sup>84</sup> that the neighbouring CE Aided primary school with 100% Muslim intake might be given to the Muslim community, I was told in no uncertain terms by the Diocesan Director of Education that this would be impossible as it would reduce the number of "Anglican places available". It did not seem to register that these "Anglican places" were not actually being taken up by Anglicans, nor even, in an ecumenical age, by other Christian denominations. Reference to School Organisation Committee (SOC) plans

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 191.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> November 2001.

in various LEAs will reveal that one of the most common criteria for the Church of England is at least protecting, and if possible increasing, the proportion of church school places available. It is clearly believed that a reduction in school places will lead to a loss of influence in the education system as a whole.

Despite the various nuances in the secularisation debate, one thing is certain, and can be put, as Gill does, starkly and simply:

...evidence of long-term decline in formal religious participation in Britain is overwhelming.<sup>85</sup>

When one looks specifically at the Church of England, decline is particularly evident.<sup>86</sup> In fact the decline in child participation has been particularly sharp. This overall decline is not – *pace* Davie – simply in practice, but also in belief. But the CE leadership seems determinedly unaware of the scale of the problem:

The dominant reaction has been to deny [the decline], most notably by questioning the statistics upon which it is based, and, beyond that, by considerable confusion about what it means to ‘belong’ to an established church’.<sup>87</sup>

The constant muddying of the waters in terms of CE membership – exemplified by the lack of a coherent baptismal policy – enables the church to continue the pretence that everyone who has not explicitly opted out (e.g. through being a Methodist or a Muslim) is actually a member of the CE. So official reports such as ‘Statistics: a Tool for Mission’<sup>88</sup> refer to ‘anecdotal evidence’ of greater attendances than statistics are able to show, clearly wanting to focus more on morale-boosting than accuracy. In particular this report suggests that

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<sup>85</sup> Gill R (2002) p. 92; see also Gill’s important essay ‘*Measuring Church Trends Over Time*’ in Avis (ed) (2003) pp. 18 – 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 95ff.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>88</sup> London, CHP, 2000.



...as a sole measure of church attendance adult usual Sunday attendance no longer seems appropriate.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, in the Christian church where, traditionally and Biblically, one of the main indicators of commitment has been sharing in corporate worship on a Sunday, that factor would be removed by one part of that church, simply because it is statistically inconvenient. As Gill comments:

It has long been a feature of democratic governments that, when they dislike public data pointing to changing worlds, they tend to alter the basis upon which the data are collected.....Yet the danger is that this either (successfully) masks the problem both from themselves and from the public at large or (unsuccessfully) simply makes the public more cynical than ever....the Church of England may be following a similar path.<sup>90</sup>

It is of particular interest that 'Statistics' also refers, as does Davie, to the notion of people making their own judgements on what they consider belonging to the Christian church might mean for them. Self-ascription of membership, without any particular responsibilities, seems to be quite acceptable.<sup>91</sup> Gill sets out the issues clearly:

Seen in terms of establishment, everyone in England is a parishioner of the Church of England and is represented in the House of Lords by its bishops. Seen in Catholic terms, rather, it is baptized Anglicans who constitute the Church of England, whether or not they subsequently attend any church services. Yet seen in the context of a pluralist, modern society – that is, in more denominational terms – it is those taking part regularly in worship who will be seen as the central focus.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, if the CE is now a denomination like any other then the only meaningful form of membership involves participation.

The nature of the church as a voluntary organisation seems to be an intrinsic aspect of its life, despite those who, theologically, would claim that God has somehow determined its membership. Certainly the church is an organisation that no-one is compelled to join; and

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> Gill (2002) pp. 99 – 100.

<sup>91</sup> *Op cit.* p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> Gill (2002) p. 100.



once joined, no-one is compelled to remain within it. Indeed, in what might be described as an ‘off-the-shelf’ society, where there is significant freedom of choice, it is no surprise to see people picking up and dropping church membership for all kinds of reasons: they may not like the new vicar, so they either take their ‘custom’ elsewhere, or stop attending church altogether. Family church attendance often focuses on the years the child (or children) are aged between 5 and 11+, particularly when the child is a member of an organisation connected with the church. When the child ‘drops out’ it would often appear to be the case that the parents drop out as well. This raises fascinating questions as to why the family attends church at all, if it is only going to be temporary – perhaps there is an element of making an effort for the sake of the child? It would certainly appear to be the case that the presence of a church secondary school in an area ‘stimulates’ church attendance.<sup>93</sup>

But it must not be assumed that the Church of England has only recently declined in influence. In 1851 a unique national religious census in England and Wales revealed that the numbers attending Dissenting (anti-CE) services almost equalled the worshippers of the CE itself. But even by the mid-18th Century the CE had become “too comfortably enmeshed with the squirearchal power structures of southern rural England to do anything about the religious needs of the fast-rising urban population.”<sup>94</sup> This was to be a continuing dilemma

....because the church’s functions as a monopolistic Establishment were essentially incompatible with the functions required of a religious organisation in a pluralist society. For whereas traditional establishment theory presupposed religious prescription and conformity, in a pluralist situation.....many areas of individual and group behaviour (including religion) would necessarily become private and voluntary concerns.....Yet in rejecting the principle of voluntarism the church unwittingly committed itself to a long rearguard action against the ultimately irresistible tendencies towards pluralism and individual freedom in English society.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> This itself would make a fascinating research project.

<sup>94</sup> Gilley S in T Thomas (ed) (1988) p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Gilbert AD (1976) p. 8.

This writer is discussing pluralism in the context of the 18th century, but society today is even more pluralistic, comprising other Faiths, as well as large numbers not subscribing (in any meaningful sense) to any religious Faith at all.

So is 21<sup>st</sup> Century England in any meaningful sense a 'Christian country'?:

....the phrase is...ambiguous, it might mean a variety of things, but there is one rather obvious meaning....A Christian country might mean a country of at least nominal Christians. If that is so...it is not clear how far the title might rightly be claimed by a country in which there were a number of people with no contact with any Christian church and no knowledge of the rudiments of the Christian faith.....Dissenters declared that a church which could only manage to attract a little more than half of those who went to church had no right to claim to be the Church of the nation....<sup>96</sup>

Yet it is still felt by many today who would not claim any particular religious commitment, that the Church of England is somehow 'my church', and the fact that the churches

....did not always succeed in touching the majority of the local population is irrelevant - their mere presence is a symbol of the church's vision of itself as being not only a part of, but also the bedrock of society.<sup>97</sup>

This perception is often difficult to understand, but it presumably has something to do with there still being a wish on the part of a broad swathe of the population - perhaps superstitious - for certain life events, and indeed, the underlying cultural context, to be sacralised.

Here we might shift focus; in trying to establish what constitutes a realistic notion of membership we should consider what might be defining characteristics of a church-type in modern society, and whether the CE meets those criteria. Niebuhr's work, particularly those ideas worked out in *Christ and Culture*, is instructive. He recognised a number of

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<sup>96</sup> Kitson Clark G (1965) pp. 150-151.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

possibilities in the relationship (the “double wrestle”<sup>98</sup>) between faith (“the church with its Lord”) and “cultural society”. Wolf, in a search for “something much larger than simply a denominational phenomenon” in Anglicanism,<sup>99</sup> what he terms a “universal situation”, applies Niebuhr’s typology. Niebuhr had found Maurice representative of ‘the cultural transformer’, which for Wolf, corresponds with a ‘broad church’ position that gathers the catholic, evangelical, reason and experience<sup>100</sup> together “into realistic, fruitful and carefully thought-out dialogue.” In fact, Niebuhr quotes Maurice railing against a sect-like mentality in the church: “I consider your sects - one and all of them - as an outrage on the Christian principle, as a denial of it....You do not really mean to unite us in Christ, as being members of his body; you mean us to unite in holding certain notions about Christ.”<sup>101</sup> Niebuhr also complained of the individualistic tendencies he found in the church. Decisions cannot be made

....in solitariness on the basis of a truth that is ‘true for me’. We do not confront an isolated Christ known to us apart from a company of witnesses who surround him....Without direct confrontation there is no truth for me in all such testimony; but without companions, collaborators, teachers, corroborating witnesses, I am at the mercy of my imaginations.<sup>102</sup>

So while breadth is needed, so is a genuine incorporatedness in the Faith.

Indeed, it is this position which, for Wolf, exemplifies Anglican comprehensiveness - that “universal situation” which protects it from becoming just another sect, and, more than that, “makes it an ecumenical prototype of the coming great church.”<sup>103</sup> He spells out precisely what this means for Anglicanism: this breadth arises out of the Church of England’s establishment that has given it “a sense of pastoral responsibility for all

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> Wolf et al (eds) (1979) pp. 157 ff.

<sup>100</sup> Hodgson finds only three: “catholic-minded conservatives, protestant-minded radicals and those whose first care was for reasonable scholarship” in Flew (1952) p. 122, as does Lewis: ‘High, Evangelical and Broad’, *Ibid.* (1952) pp. 311 ff.

<sup>101</sup> Niebuhr (1952) p. 223.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>103</sup> *Op cit.* p. 160.



members of the national community and not just for church goers,” and quotes with approbation the view of J T McNeill, a Presbyterian:

While the cure of souls is a field of controversy in Anglicanism, this has led rather to its cultivation than to its neglect...it is probably safe to say that no other great communion has given more attention to the cure of souls, either in theory or in practice.<sup>104</sup>

So for Wolf, the strength of the Anglican Church, and so the Church of England, is the very characteristic that provides for and guarantees its nature as a church (rather than a denomination): a pastoral comprehensiveness which has tended to focus not on matters of doctrine, but on “leading the Christian life”. It is evident (not least in that he quotes John Donne’s words: “Moral divinity becomes us all, but natural divinity and metaphysic divinity, almost all may spare”) that by ‘leading a Christian life’ he refers primarily, possibly solely, to matters of morality. This would seem to suggest that membership of this comprehensive church involves no real commitment to particular beliefs, but simply to goodness. This, of course, fails to recognise the complex relationship between religion and morality: religion has no monopoly on morality; while the moral dimension is central to every Faith, it is perfectly possible to live a moral life without adherence to any Faith.

What then of worship; is this an essential function of the church, or is the church simply there in order to have a pastoral role in society? It would seem very difficult to live a Christian life without participating at all in corporate worship, not least because of the element of mutual support and encouragement, but also because of the explicit sense of identity that gives. Gordon Jeanes argues: “We exist in order to glorify God. That may not be the whole truth, but it is a very great part of it.”<sup>105</sup> He goes on to outline its importance for the church’s mission (“where much of the teaching, pastoral and social life is focused”) and as the activity in which Christians respond to God. It is of the essence of the activity of

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p. 161.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Liturgy and Worship’ in Hannaford (ed) (1998) p. 243.

the Body of Christ that it gathers regularly for worship. On a purely pragmatic note: if being a Christian was simply a matter of living a good life, then any objective assessment of that (for church school admissions) would be difficult, if not impossible. For Wolf also, worship and the liturgy are the “overwhelming and dominant” aspects of the church’s life.<sup>106</sup> He notes that one of the main problems of Prayer Book revision, is that the Book of Common Prayer is not simply a tool for clergy but “the equipment for every lay person in leading the spiritual life.” He explicitly recognises that the laity, as well as the clergy, have a responsibility to engage in worship. So, he concludes,

Anglicanism may be defined as a way of being Christian that involves a pastorally and liturgically oriented dialogue between four partners: catholics, evangelicals, and advocates of reason and of experience.

But is Wolf correct in his judgement that the Church of England is still a church-type (‘ecclesia’) and not a denomination? In fact, Wolf goes too far. In trying to argue against the CE having become sect-like, his emphasis on pastoral comprehensiveness and individual morality, despite affirming the importance of worship for clergy and laity alike, leads him to hang on to a model that has clearly had its day, as both sociological and cultural indicators show.

Of course, Wolf’s assessment is shared by the CE itself as, at a number of levels and on a number of issues, it desperately seeks to cling onto the power and influence it used to have as ‘ecclesia’, even if the continuing theological ‘cost’ of that is Establishment, and the right of the Prime Minister (who might be an atheist) to appoint senior figures to posts in the church. It is one of a number of “voluntary associations....in which individuals participate in whatever manner suits them best”,<sup>107</sup> and as such it may be compared with a political party. Only a minority are active within it, some turn out at elections and vote for it (the equivalent to what Davie describes as “the care [taken by the church] of much wider

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<sup>106</sup> *Op cit.* p. 161.

<sup>107</sup> Davie (1994) p. 107.

sections of the population at certain points in their lives” – the rites of passage), while others, if pressed, would confess some sympathy with it. The present condition of the Church of England is the result of the process of gradual disengagement with English society, despite some fairly firm handholds which still remain through Establishment (although a number appear to be weakening). In his enthronement sermon in 1983, John Habgood was frank:

Today’s world is different; we live in a country at least partially divided into different religions and cultures....we have seen the public dimensions of faith steadily eroded. There are many whose religion only surfaces on those odd occasions when it still seems natural to celebrate some vaguely religious aspect of national life. Others go to the opposite extreme and are so filled with the joy and peace of simple personal relationship with Christ, that they wonder whether the public dimensions of faith are worth preserving. Others doubt whether it even makes sense to speak of public faith in an age with so uncertain a grip on religious realities.<sup>108</sup>

And in a lecture just two years later:

British culture still stands basically within the Christian tradition and most British people, however little they actually do about the Christian faith, would be unwilling to drop the label Christian.....[Nevertheless] while I would want to claim that our nation still feels, and wants to go on feeling, a continuity with Christian tradition, the actual relationship between our present culture and the churches is under severe strain. Many churches are no longer willing to play a role as guardians of culture and carriers of identity. There are strong pressures to raise the barriers between Christians and to build little enclaves where Christians can be themselves, can speak their own language and build their own culture.<sup>109</sup>

In fact, Habgood does not support this latter tendency; or rather, not the extreme exclusivist form which he goes on to describe. So he sidesteps the real dilemma. Just how far can the Church of England continue to believe that most English people are in membership? What meaningful content can be given to the assertion: “I am a member of the Church of England, but I don’t practise” (contrary to Davie, neither belonging nor believing)? Habgood goes on to say (somewhat wryly, one imagines): “provided people do and say the right things in a reassuring manner, the content of belief does not seem to

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<sup>108</sup> Habgood J (1988) pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 14 – 15.

matter too much, as long as it is kept private.”<sup>110</sup> But does a private Christianity provide an acceptable ecclesiology and, more to the point, what precisely separates a Christian from a non-Christian who is not a member of another Faith?

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.



## Chapter 2: Towards an Anglican Ecclesiology.

The Church of England considers itself as part of the “true and apostolic Church of Christ”. Indeed, “as our duty to the said Church of England requires, we do constitute and ordain that no member thereof shall be at liberty to maintain or hold the contrary,”<sup>1</sup> for

....the catholicity of Anglicanism rests on a recognition that the church is not only a mystical entity, known only to God, nor merely a local gathering of people for worship, but a visible society that is both divine and human, spanning the globe and persisting through history.<sup>2</sup>

The Elizabethan settlement aimed to make the Church of England as inclusive as possible,<sup>3</sup> incorporating both Catholic and Protestant, but

[T]he national church which was established by the Acts of Uniformity and Supremacy of 1559 was national only in the sense that all Elizabethans were required by law and under various penalties to adhere publicly to it and to attend its services.<sup>4</sup>

Many went to church because they had to, not because they felt any spiritual need. Nevertheless, religion still had an enormous impact on popular culture and belief. If the Church of England was, indeed, the “Church of Reconciliation, where Anglicans have assured each other that the coexistence of Catholic and of Protestant elements in their church is no diplomatic compromise or a balanced middle road, but is a genuine unity in Christ of these two historical traditions,”<sup>5</sup> then that is not how the post-Reformation church appeared to many of its members. The Church of England was riven with party factions from the beginning. Yet the Ordinal of Edward VI, drawn up by Cranmer and others, showed a deep concern for the historical continuity of the church, and the Thirty Nine

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<sup>1</sup> *Church of England Canons of 1969, Section A 1 'Of the Church of England'*; quoted in Evans and Wright (1991) p. 473.

<sup>2</sup> Avis P (2000) p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Hodgson in Flew (1952) p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> McGrath P (1967) p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Browning WRF (ed) (1964) p. 3.

Articles of Religion,<sup>6</sup> incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer, and requiring affirmation by clergy, offered a clear ecclesiological statement:

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.<sup>7</sup>

These Articles, the first text issued in 1563, attempted to define the position of the Church of England in relation to the controversies of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and so in that sense are set within a particular frame of history.

Of course, the crucial issue for the English Church in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century was its specific identity over against the rival claims of the Church of Rome. By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the focus was rather more on defending the integrity of the church from the criticisms of the more radical Puritans, who felt that the English Reformation had not gone far enough. The Puritans gained the ascendancy during the Commonwealth, but during the Restoration period much ecclesiological effort was devoted to providing a supporting rationale for the new political arrangements, while maintaining a strong anti-Catholic stance. This trend was to be turned on its head by the Tractarian Movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century which sought to restore what was felt to be the lost catholicity of the Church of England in the face of growing secularisation. Whilst ecclesiological activity was not exactly 'dead' during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, neither (apart from sporadic forays into the 'establishment' debate) has it been particularly lively.

## Ecclesiology

Just as 'theology' provides 'words about God', so 'ecclesiology' gives us 'words about the church'. 'Ecclesiology' finds its root in '*ekklesia*' which in everyday Greek was the

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<sup>6</sup> Articles XIX to XXXIV deal with the Church, its sacramental life and its organisation.

<sup>7</sup> Article XIX, 'Of the Church'.

‘assembly’;<sup>8</sup> but for the church its significance is much greater than this simple meaning might suggest. In the Septuagint, ‘*ekklesia*’ was used to represent the Hebrew ‘*edhah*’ and ‘*qahal*’, each capable of being rendered by ‘congregation’ or ‘assembly’ (AV). The RV, however, translates the former only as ‘congregation’ and the latter only as ‘assembly’. The root of ‘*edhah*’ is to be found in the idea of ‘appointing’, so this is a ‘group which comes together by appointment’. ‘*Qahal*’, on the other hand, comes from the root meaning ‘to call’. Originally it carried the sense of a group called together as a council, or a group of soldiers. However, the Old Testament term is particularly used of those who come together to hear the Torah, and virtually becomes the equivalent of ‘the people of God’. The ‘*qahal Yahweh*’ is the ‘people/congregation of the Lord’.

‘*Qahal*’ also renders ‘*synagoge*’, the meeting place for Jews, and so those 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians who were becoming separated from their Jewish roots used the term to symbolise both continuity with and discontinuity from the ‘old’ Israel. While ‘synagogue’ became the normal term for the Jewish meetinghouse and place of worship, Hellenistic Christians kept the focus on the ‘*ekklesia*’. This term continues to have an important meaning in modern day discussion of the nature of the church, and provides the root for associated vocabulary (‘ecclesiastical’ etc.). The secular connotation of ‘*ekklesia*’ (‘assembly’) was also important, for it was “an empty, formal term, free of old cultic and religious associations, needing to be filled by a new content. This was accomplished by a rich profusion of metaphors.....”<sup>9</sup>

However, ‘*ekklesia*’ is only found in Matthew’s Gospel, where it occurs three times. Although the reference in Matthew 18:17 appears to be to a local Jewish community, the use of ‘*ekklesia*’ in Matthew 16:18 is almost certainly related to a Christian community, at

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<sup>8</sup> Definitions taken from Richardson A (ed) (1950).

<sup>9</sup> Hodgson P & Williams R ‘The Church’ in Hodgson R & King R (eds) (1983) p. 224.



least as a 'Messianic remnant'.<sup>10</sup> The meaning becomes more explicit in the Book of Acts: here, the '*ekklesia*' explicitly refers to the Christian community consisting of those who have accepted Jesus as Messiah, have been baptised, and have received forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> This time, therefore, the reference is not to a local assembly, but to a group who share specific beliefs and actions. It is, of course, still thought to be continuous with the '*ekklesia*' of the OT.<sup>12</sup>

The word appears more often in the NT Letters, and the spread of Christianity caused '*ekklesia*' to attract three distinct, albeit connected, meanings: a local Christian community, or communities reflecting the '*ecclesia*' of Jerusalem; a collective term for all Christian communities i.e. the whole church.<sup>13</sup> There was also a sense in which the term is used to denote a more mystical group, with a cosmic dimension: the body of which Christ is the Head.<sup>14</sup> For Avis, this designation "seems to transcend the individual local congregations and even the whole church on earth."<sup>15</sup>

For St Paul the church is both local and universal,<sup>16</sup> and he also uses '*ecclesia*' to refer to the 'worshipping community'.<sup>17</sup> Dix argued:

Until the third century the word 'church' means invariably....the solemn assembly for the liturgy, and by extension those who take part in this.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore the church is not one of many – as with Jewish or pagan groups – it is the only church: the Church of God in Christ,<sup>19</sup> the Messianic Community. In this sense it is not a voluntary group, a social group of like-minded people, who come together because

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson (1950) p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts* 2: 37 – 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Acts* 7: 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Acts* 9: 31 or 20: 28.

<sup>14</sup> *Colossians* 1: 18; *Ephesians* 1: 22ff.

<sup>15</sup> Avis (2000) p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *1 Corinthians* 15: 9 and *1 Corinthians* 12: 28.

<sup>17</sup> *1 Corinthians* 11: 18, 14: 19 etc.

<sup>18</sup> Dix G (1943) p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> *1 Thessalonians* 2: 14.

they choose, or because they share certain interests or ideas. It is a group initiated by Jesus Christ himself - the images of Body and Spouse show the depth of that connection – and it was initiated for a purpose.<sup>20</sup> So what is a Christian community if it is not a community of Christians? The thread of this question winds through this thesis.

Just as ecclesiology is an aspect of theology, so ecclesiology itself is multi-faceted:

....[it] has a number of departments or sub-divisions: missiology; pastoral theology; the theology of the ministry and sacraments; worship and liturgy; structures of authority; ecumenical theology. Although ecclesiology has a practical dimension and is nothing if it is not applied to the life of the church, it is essentially a branch of Christian doctrine concerned with what we believe about the church and God's purpose for it and how that purpose is to be carried out in accordance with God's will revealed in scripture as interpreted in the light of tradition and reason.<sup>21</sup>

Here the basic principles of theological activity are affirmed, and we recognise that the study of the church involves a variety of foci, one of which (mission) is particularly relevant.

One central issue relates to the interface between the church and the world. Etymologically the root of 'ekklesia' is associated with being 'called out'. The Christian Church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people".<sup>22</sup> Christians live in the world as "aliens and exiles".<sup>23</sup> They must, therefore,

....travel light: Jesus said, "The world is a bridge; pass over it. Do not build houses on it".....On the other hand, the *paroikoi* of 1 Peter are *resident aliens*; Christians need to be sufficiently at home to be able to function constructively.<sup>24</sup>

The church does not belong to the world,<sup>25</sup> but is necessarily in it, having been sent on an apostolic mission.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Matthew 28: 18 – 20*; whether the Great Commission is to be regarded as historical is irrelevant; in the Gospel story it represents the link between the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church.

<sup>21</sup> Avis (2000) p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *1 Peter 2: 9*.

<sup>23</sup> *1 Peter 2: 11*.

<sup>24</sup> Sweet J 'Identity and Tradition' in M Perham (ed) (1993) p. 75.

So the church is the community of the faithful; those who have responded to the call of Jesus Christ, in whatever fashion that call is perceived, and who respond by gathering together in communities, all of which are part of the greater whole, for the explicit purpose of worship. In this sense, there has always been something exclusive about the notion of the church. Of course, the effects of history have blurred this exclusivity considerably. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, and from thence, the official religion of Barbarian Europe, then all were embraced by it – whether they liked it or not! When the king was baptised, then all were baptised. During the Reformation the same process occurred: *'cuius regio, eius religio'*.

### Anglican Theology

Is there such a thing as an Anglican theology? Hannaford expresses regret that in the modern age “the number of theologians publishing work that is self-consciously Anglican has declined considerably,”<sup>27</sup> and concludes

...there is not, and the majority of us do not desire that there should be, a system of distinctively Anglican Theology.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, “many claim that what is distinctive about Anglicanism is precisely that it has no distinctive theology of its own.”<sup>29</sup> Archbishop Michael Ramsey disagreed:

There is such a thing as Anglican theology and it is sorely needed at the present day. But because it is neither a system nor a confession, but a method, a use and a direction, it cannot be defined or even perceived as a ‘thing in itself’, and it may elude the eyes of those who ask: ‘What is it?’ It has been proved, and will be proved again, by its fruit and its works.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *John* 17: 14, 16.

<sup>26</sup> *John* 17: 6.

<sup>27</sup> Hannaford R ‘Anglicanism and the Theology of Culture’ in Hannaford R (ed) (1998) pp. 292 – 328.

<sup>28</sup> 1922 Doctrine Commission *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938) p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Op cit.* p. 293.

<sup>30</sup> Ramsey M (1945) p. 2.



This view was echoed by Bishop McAdoo<sup>31</sup> who reminded his readers that Anglican theology as such was simply based on the teachings and practice of the early church, and in this is strongly supported by John Macquarrie, who nevertheless admits that because the Anglican theological tradition is “hard to define...there is some excuse for those critics who say that Anglicanism has no distinctive theology and that on doctrinal matters ‘anything goes’ within the Anglican communion.”<sup>32</sup> He argues that Anglicans have never felt the need perceived, for example, by the Roman Catholic Church to “spell out” its doctrines in any kind of detail or with any great precision. One of the main reasons for that is that Anglicans have never really understood themselves as belonging to a ‘different’ church: they are part of the church catholic, and readily accept the catholic creeds. So the Anglican Church has done without “agreed and canonically binding dogmatic interpretations of the Scriptures and Christian tradition”<sup>33</sup> – even the 39 Articles come nowhere near being such a thing as the Roman Catholic Church’s *‘Enchiridion Symbolorum’* or the various Protestant ‘Confessions’. The ‘Anglican tradition’ has permitted a variety of interpretations, and is very suspicious of any who seek to place limits around theology. In short there has been “a distrust of over-precision in doctrinal matters and recognition that theological statements are bound to have a more or less provisional character.”<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, while Anglican theologians seem to have great liberty of interpretation, there have been at least some non-negotiable areas. Even if it is sometimes difficult to discern what these are, particularly in areas of doctrinal theology (one thinks of Anglican contributions to the Christological debates of recent years, or more specifically of the writings of Don Cupitt), Anglican practice does seem to presuppose certain common beliefs, such as a Trinitarian, as opposed to Unitarian, theology; some kind of shared

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<sup>31</sup> McAdoo H R (1965).

<sup>32</sup> Macquarrie (1986) p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Hannaford (1998) p. 293.

<sup>34</sup> Macquarrie (1986) p. 92.

Eucharistic theology; and an adherence to episcopacy. The 1981 Report of the Church of England Doctrine Commission argued that it was

....more typical of Anglicanism to rely upon custom, ceremonial and, above all, its forms of public prayer, to reveal its doctrine by implication.<sup>35</sup>

Anyone, therefore, who wants to know ‘what is Anglican belief about x’ should be referred to the written liturgy, and how it is performed. ‘*Lex credendi, lex ora*’: beliefs reflected in prayer and worship. In fact, argues Macquarrie, “Anglicanism has been rather strict in matters of practice, even when it seems lax in expounding the theology behind these practices.”<sup>36</sup> We must, however, set against this the view expressed by Hannaford that “doctrinal identity cannot easily be established if it has to be inferred from the language of the liturgy....[for] unlike the language of dogmatics, which is exclusive in character, the language of liturgy is expansive and inclusive.”<sup>37</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that there remains a variety of interpretations of ‘Anglican doctrine’ or ‘Anglican theology’.

The fact that there have been Doctrine Commissions at all would suggest some attempt at coherence in Anglican theology. The first was established in 1922, despite the misgivings of Archbishop Randall Davidson who felt that too much precision could be divisive, and it reported in 1938. Its terms of reference were:

To consider the nature and grounds of Christian doctrine with a view to demonstrating the extent of existing agreement within the Church of England and with a view to investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences.<sup>38</sup>

This illustrates perfectly the view that there is at least some kind of recognisable Anglican doctrine, but that not every aspect of it will gain universal agreement. Some criticised the Report because it allowed for too much latitude, but in general it was welcomed as a useful

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<sup>35</sup> *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith* London, SPCK, 1981, pp. 141 – 142.

<sup>36</sup> Macquarrie (1986) p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> Hannaford (1998) p. 294.

<sup>38</sup> *Doctrine in the Church of England 1938* (1982 edition) London, SPCK p. 19.

statement of the principles undergirding theological statements and their content. In fact this “masterly”<sup>39</sup> report was reprinted in 1982. Further reports from different Doctrine Commissions were published in 1976,<sup>40</sup> 1981,<sup>41</sup> 1995,<sup>42</sup> and 2003.<sup>43</sup> None of these found unanimity straightforward,<sup>44</sup> but the 1976 Report in particular gave many the impression of a confused and divided church. Of 114 pages, those where there was agreement, still embracing differing theological positions, counted for just over a third. The rest of the Report consisted of position papers by individual members. Although the 1995 Report was a unanimous and positive statement, and

....a balanced and considered work, faithful to classical Christian doctrine but also attuned to the contemporary context for Christian mission....the report was largely dismissed in the press as an example of theological reductionism....Many in the church took their lead from the press and dismissed ‘The Mystery of Salvation’ as a further sign of the Church of England’s doctrinal confusion.<sup>45</sup>

So what is the nature of Anglican doctrine? The 1981 Report explicitly spelled out what it termed ‘doctrine declared’: various statements authorised and issued formally by the church. ‘Doctrine implicit’ is given by liturgical practice, but an important place is also accorded to the traditions of the church. These include the canon of the Bible and the use of the creeds, and more recent Eucharistic celebration have drawn directly from early and medieval usage. The traditions also include the so-called ‘historic formularies’ of the church which bear witness to Christian truth.<sup>46</sup> These are generally acknowledged to be the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion (1571), the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and the Ordinal. Others might add to this list items such as the Canon Law of the church (originating in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century), the so-called ‘Lambeth Quadrilateral’ (four doctrinal

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<sup>39</sup> Macquarrie (1986) p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> *Christian Believing* London, SPCK.

<sup>41</sup> *Believing in the Church* London, SPCK.

<sup>42</sup> *The Mystery of Salvation: the Story of God’s Gift* London, CHP.

<sup>43</sup> *Being Human* London, CHP.

<sup>44</sup> Although the Chairman of the 2003 Report, Stephen Sykes, commented that it was “once again an agreed text, which.....I can only celebrate as the fruit of very considerable forbearance and graciousness.”*Ibid.* p. xii.

<sup>45</sup> Hannaford (1998) pp. 297 – 298.

<sup>46</sup> *Canon C15*.



principles arising from the 1888 Lambeth Conference of Bishops), particularly noteworthy statements from other Lambeth Conferences and from individual prominent Anglican theologians. Reason and experience tend to be accorded different value by different Anglicans, but few would deny either some role in doctrinal interpretation. Finally, reference was made to ‘doctrine diffused’, what sociologists might term ‘folk’ or ‘common religion’, but which has some recognisably Christian element. In the light of the sociological/cultural debate outlined above, how much weight that should be given will inevitably be a matter of opinion.

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### **Anglican Ecclesiology**

There has been a similar reluctance for the CE to develop a systematic ecclesiology of its own.

We have to face the uncomfortable fact that traditional Anglican diffidence in presenting its doctrine of the church.....strikes Christians of other allegiances not as the fruit of modesty, but of pride and fear: pride in desiring to occupy a place which no other communion in Christendom occupies, and fear of the consequences, internal and external, of having to formulate a responsible account on behalf of a body which has got out of the habit of taking its theology seriously.<sup>47</sup>

This has been seen by some as the Church of England being unable to determine a single and coherent view on anything much at all. For Stephen Ross White it is due to an obsession with “penultimate issues”, so “running away from the ultimate issue of Anglican identity and ecclesiology.”<sup>48</sup> This view has been echoed by others:

We can hardly be surprised that theologians who admire the Church of England and also write of it with affection are yet obliged to categorise its ecclesiological situation as unsatisfactory.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sykes SW (1995) pp. 119-120.

<sup>48</sup> White SR (1996) p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Browning WRF (1964) p. 4.

The situation is exacerbated by the tension in which Anglicans conceive themselves as being part of the larger church, but that larger church, in the shape of Roman Catholics and Orthodox seem to want to deny this, or at least circumscribe the notion.

Can we nevertheless identify a distinctively Anglican (and *a fortiori* a Church of England) ecclesiology? For John Howe the answer is a resounding negative:

There is no separate Anglican identity. To search for one, as some ecumenists feel they must, is an unprofitable exercise.<sup>50</sup>

In 1951 Leonard Hodgson, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, prepared a paper for the World Conference on Faith and Order: 'The Doctrine of the Church *as Held and Taught* in the Church of England',<sup>51</sup> which "has become one of the best representative semi-official statements about the Anglican understanding of the church."<sup>52</sup> Hodgson made the point that the title "has been carefully chosen so as not to suggest that there is any specifically Anglican doctrine [of the church]."<sup>53</sup> The classic formularies of the Church of England were not confessions or foundation documents, and so do not set out a "specifically Anglican corpus of doctrine to be the starting-point of all later Anglican teaching."<sup>54</sup>

Stephen Sykes believes differently:

A careful inspection of the literature reveals that it could not be said without qualification that Anglicans have failed to attend to the doctrine of the church....The failure of contemporary Anglicanism is rather a failure to foster this study.....<sup>55</sup>

and his view is echoed by Paul Avis, who adds that

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<sup>50</sup> Howe J (1985) p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> Published in Flew RN (1952) 'The Nature of the Church' pp. 121ff, my italics.

<sup>52</sup> Wolf et al (eds) (1979) p. 151.

<sup>53</sup> Flew RN (1952) p. 121.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> Sykes SW (1995) p. 76.

....it is incumbent upon us to articulate this. The present work confirms that there is indeed a *tacit* Anglican ecclesiology – though it is not static and needs to be disentangled from various specific historical frameworks.<sup>56</sup>

Avis adds more trenchantly elsewhere:

It is entirely appropriate that there should be an Anglican ecclesiology....Within the plurality of ecclesiologies.....how would Anglicans know that they belong to the Christian Church without an ecclesiology that substantiated that claim?.....It is the doctrine of the church...rather than the doctrine of salvation...that has been the driving force of historic Anglicanism<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, this ecclesiology has not been “without qualification” and practical failures. While the words ‘implicit’ and ‘tacit’ do not suggest any clearly worked out ecclesiology, as with ‘Anglican theology’, “although it is not defined dogmatically, Anglican practice presupposes a particular ecclesiology.....reflected in the dignity and importance accorded to the episcopal office.”<sup>58</sup> So Anglican ecclesiology is also implicit, and historically no single ecclesiological position has predominated.

Avis’ *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* is itself a “study of Anglican identity, Anglican self-definition and Anglican apologetic...[to] provide some of the resources or raw materials for an Anglican doctrine of the church.”<sup>59</sup> Identity is about “where we fit in.....[and contains] a dynamic of stability and change, sameness and development, continuity and adaptation.”<sup>60</sup> Avis notes the beginning of a crisis of identity in the institutional church as a whole, and particularly within Anglicanism, where the foundational Church of England no longer has the assured place in society it used to have.

[All] institutional forms of Christianity have suffered an erosion of their authority, identity and numerical support in the process of secularisation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Avis P (1989) p. xvii, my italics.

<sup>57</sup> Avis P (2000) pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>58</sup> Hannaford (1998) p. 294.

<sup>59</sup> *Op cit.* p. xvii.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.



However, he questions how important the issue is in the minds of church members (defined here as “congregations”). Not much at all, he is obviously sorry to say.

For Avis, Anglicanism is a type of Catholic Christianity where faith is taken for granted because there is a “deep, unquestioned, implicit integration of life and faith, world and church, nature and spirit.”<sup>62</sup> However, the cohesiveness and confidence of this type has now disappeared, and has left a crisis of identity. Avis identifies five main criteria for successfully maintaining a corporate identity: continuity, the ideal of the group, interaction, traditions and structure.

He sees the recent liturgical revision in the Church of England as disruptive to continuity, not least because it leads to confusion over the teaching of the church:

It is asking for trouble in the realm of identity-formation if the received symbols and constellations of meaning are disposed of with scant regard for what the social and human sciences can tell us about the logic of symbolism in personal and corporate life.<sup>63</sup>

Further identity problems are caused by a failure in ecclesiology – a lack of understanding among both clergy and laity about the nature of the church to which they belong. Why, for example, is there such division over the ordination of women? Ecumenical interaction continues to be limited, and there is something demoralising about facing a basic lack of acceptance (e.g. of Anglican Orders) at the hands of other Christians. Add to this his view that tradition has been “undermined” and that structures are coming “increasingly under threat”,<sup>64</sup> and the whole is, in Avis’ view, a breakdown in any sense of Anglican/CE identity. That is why, he suggests, that instead of finding identity in, for example, parish structures, many Anglicans find it in ecclesiastical ‘parties’, which have the potential to be inherently destructive of the whole.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

So while the Anglican Church is very much a branch of the church catholic

Christian identity is dependent on cultural norms. It settles into the shape determined by the available ideological receptacles. Christian identity is moulded not by pure theology, for there is no such thing, but by the assumptions, needs and demands of time and circumstance....In the twentieth century our sense of identity is paradoxically both macrocosmic and microcosmic. The more we become aware of our status as citizens of the global community, the more our national heritage and local identity mean to us....The more we become aware of our common identity with Christians of other traditions, from whom we have been separated by political, geographical, linguistic and other cultural factors as much as by theological differences, the more we feel compelled to defend our hard won way of living the Christian life together.<sup>65</sup>

He explores several 'paradigms' which have or which might provide an appropriate focus for Anglican identity or self-understanding. The so-called 'Erastian' (the 'nation-as-church' or the 'citizen as Anglican') paradigm, emphasises the role of the State, which is coterminous with the church; the sovereign is 'Supreme Governor' of the church, and to a certain extent a sacred figure. It is enough just to be English to have the Anglican identity; baptism is automatic; indeed, not to be baptised is, under this model, to be somewhat anti-social. The 'apostolic' (or 'episcopal succession') paradigm lays stress on the role of the Bishops, and an identity validated through the historical link with the Apostles (i.e. the same basis as that claimed by the Roman Catholic Church – although persistently denied by them to Anglicans). Historically this model, or the restatement of this model, began to supplement the Erastian model, due very much to the impact of Tractarianism. For a variety of reasons, it was never to be embedded.

Having evaluated these two paradigms, Avis' conclusions are that

[T]he erastian paradigm is dead [although traces remain in the Establishment]....The Apostolic paradigm is divisive [ecumenically]...An alternative paradigm would be baptismal or Christological....This has to do with our incorporation into the body of Christ through holy baptism....[but] confirmation appropriates it, the eucharist presupposes it.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 302.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 303 – 304.

This third possibility (also ‘communion-through-baptism’) is more implicit, but the focus here, quite usefully for the purposes of this study, is baptism, and so, membership. The key biblical text is 1 Corinthians 12: 13 – baptism into membership of the Body. As Avis notes in a later book:

This approach brings out the immense ecclesiological significance of baptism as the instrument of our incorporation into Christ’s messianic office as our Prophet, Priest and King – an incorporation which qualifies us to carry out prophetic, priestly and royal functions in the church.<sup>67</sup>

Here we might note that the notion is not simply of joining (“incorporation into”) but of active involvement in the “functions” of the church. Furthermore, although such a paradigm

....may appear to be a formula for a reductionist doctrine of the church...it is certainly not a compromise at the level of the lowest common denominator.....[For it] involves a mystical perception of the fundamental ecclesial reality. It is response to the transcendent mystery of God....<sup>68</sup>

One of the benefits of this model, claims Avis, is that although it provides an Anglican identity, it is not an exclusive identity, because baptism is something shared by the vast majority of Christian groups. The Christian identity is prior; Anglicanism’s distinctiveness – real enough in Avis’ view - is to be found elsewhere (authority, episcopacy *with* synodical government, toleration of differences etc).

Although Avis had rejected his first two models as being insufficient in themselves, he does feel that there are aspects of each that can be ‘conserved’. He suggests a number of things that he would value from each, and specifically from the ‘erastian’ model; reinforcement of the principle that

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<sup>67</sup> Avis (2000) p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> Avis (1989) p. 310.



....the church's mission is to all. Anglicanism can never be a sect. The Church of England is a territorial church and embraces all within its parishes who do not refuse its ministry. Its ethos is essentiality inclusive, not exclusive.<sup>69</sup>

The various points made here in these apparently simple sentences require some unpacking, for they seem to involve confusion and at least one *non-sequitur*. At first glance they seem to be quite unexceptional, and would probably receive strong affirmation by many Anglicans. What they fail to do is differentiate between those who are members of the church (and so presumably engaged in its mission) and those outside the church who 'receive' that mission (undefined). Is the church inclusive in membership terms, or inclusive in its mission and service? Even to consider the far-fetched description 'sect' is to introduce an ecclesiological red herring, and one that seems to have been chosen for its 'shock value':

Attitudes are often struck by the use of language. Certain words are evocative and turn people towards or away from certain positions. For example, the word 'sect' suggests extremism, so when it is said that disestablishment would 'turn the Church of England into a mere sect' people do not want the label. So they turn away from disestablishment – just because of the word.<sup>70</sup>

In fact, very few would want to, and no-one could seriously seek to describe the Church of England as a sect-type. It simply does not meet the criteria. If there is a debate to be had over sociological type it is between ecclesia/church and denomination. But these terms are primarily to do with the nature of the membership, not the mission of that membership. Here is the confusion. Avis appears to be arguing that because the Church of England is not a sect, it consists (in its membership) of everyone who does not actually opt out (ecclesia/church-type). What is particularly unclear is whether his use of 'ethos' relates to the church itself (its membership) or to its mission to those outside the church. A similar confusion exists with respect to his phrase "embrace all" – is the 'embracing' of the membership, or of those to be served by the membership? It would be quite possible for a

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<sup>69</sup> Avis (2000) p. 26.

<sup>70</sup> Hall C (1993) 'A Church within a Nation', *Churchman*, Vol. 107 No. 4, p. 325.

Christian body to be somewhat exclusive in the demands it makes on its membership, while being very open in love to those outside to whom it seeks to minister.

Certainly it is true, as Avis points out frequently, that Anglican ecclesiology

....has not been carried on in the insularity due to absolute and exclusive claims that have been typical of some other churches....[and that it ] has openly drawn on the theological resources of other traditions....[It has] never assumed that it is the only one there is and therefore has never made the mistake of exclusively identifying what may be said of Anglicanism with what might be said of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed it regards itself as *included in* the whole church of God. But that inclusion does not necessarily mean that it must be inclusive in its membership. Disappointingly, the one issue with which Avis (and others) seems reluctant to engage is this notion of membership. His 'baptismal paradigm' is merely to be a guide to the question: 'What makes us Christians?' and 'What constitutes the church?', and he tends to leave these questions open. This particular paradigm might seem to imply that the membership issue is simply solved by its equation with baptism, i.e. every baptised person is a member. In one sense this is strictly correct, although having made the point about Anglican identity alongside other churches, he cannot have his cake and eat it. If every person baptised into the church of England is thereby a member, they are also members of the whole church of which the Church of England is a part. In sociological terms, therefore, we would clearly be dealing with a universal church-type, a concept which I have already argued is difficult to sustain.

Furthermore, Avis himself qualifies his 'baptism paradigm' by his reference to it appearing reductionist, presumably because he is somehow limiting membership to those who are baptised (i.e. it then does not "embrace all", unless of course he identifies those who might "refuse its ministry" with those who are unbaptised, which would hardly seem to be what

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<sup>71</sup> Avis (2000) pp. 30 -31.

he is trying to do), and adding the concept of 'communion' to it in two apparently distinct ways: 'communion-through-baptism' (and it is not clear what he means by this: the baptised form a communion of people?), and by linking confirmation and eucharist to it. This latter would seem to presuppose that membership is actually further limited either to those who have been confirmed, or further still to those confirmed who attend the Eucharist (recognising that many see confirmation as a kind of graduation ceremony).

Some limited clarification is offered by Avis almost incidentally. Firstly, he claims, "Anglicans are committed by their tradition of ecclesiology to the *visible expression* of the church's unity."<sup>72</sup> In support of this he quotes Article 19 which refers to "a congregation of faithful men (*sic*) in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered.....", and makes the point that here 'congregation' "almost certainly does not mean....[the] local worshipping congregation", but the "national church made up of dioceses.....the 'congregation' in the strict sense *is* the diocese." There are evident difficulties with this. Having pointed out that that Latin text of the Article uses '*coetus fidelium*' (which he translates 'assembly of the faithful') for 'congregation', he then argues that this in turn is equivalent to '*congregatio Sanctorum*' ('assembly of the saints'), and that both '*coetus*' and '*congregatio*' correspond to the Greek '*ekklesia*'. This, he claims, is the unit led by the Bishop. There are two immediate problems: firstly, are his translations, acceptable enough as they stand, able to bear the weight of the meaning he desires i.e. of a large diocesan size unit of people? '*Coetus*' actually denotes a coming or meeting together; a literal gathering. It is used by classical authors for 'assembly', 'crowd', or 'company'. Cicero used the term '*coetus*' alongside '*concilium*', apparently to mean a physical gathering of a number of people in one place for one purpose. Similarly, '*congregatio*' denotes a union, a society, an assembly or an association, but again the main idea appears

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 76ff; my italics.



to be of bringing people together into the same place, as is '*ekklesia*' in its original classical sense (in Athens, the assembly of full citizens).

However, in the early church, the Bishop tended to lead a local congregation rather than the somewhat larger units which today we associate with dioceses. Returning to the plain meaning of the Article itself, a 'congregation' in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered sounds very much like a local congregation, rather than a larger unit such as a diocese, particularly one which probably never 'gathers' together in its entirety. Whenever a priest celebrates the Eucharist, s/he does so as a representative of the Bishop, but that still does not make the diocese itself the most obvious interpretation of 'congregation'. Furthermore, if Avis is right in his assertion that the visible church (and the unit referred to in the Article) is the diocese under its bishop, then that still leaves us with the question: 'who are its members?'

Second, the church is "a visible, universal society with visible tangible structures of its common life."<sup>73</sup> Once again, however, there is a considerable lack of clarity as to the precise nature of the 'visibility' and 'tangibility'. Obviously a Diocese is reasonably tangible and has structure; but then so does a parish. Neither, however, are "universal" societies, and so we must presume that here Avis is referring to the whole church (Anglican or even beyond).

To sum up: the more obvious interpretation of the evidence cited by Avis is the local worshipping community, rather than any larger group which provides the basis unit of Anglicanism. Indeed, it is probably true that individual Anglicans identify themselves far more with their parish church than with the diocese, or any larger unit.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

In considering these issues, Avis suggested that the debate on Anglican identity actually began with the publication of *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, where Sykes

....castigated complacent appeals to the comprehensiveness of Anglicanism as merely an excuse for morally reprehensible theological laziness and evasiveness.<sup>74</sup>

How could there be any integrity when no one knew what the church stood for? Avis, of course, disputed the equation between integrity and identity. In fact the explicit focus of Sykes' book is not the more narrow starting point of ecclesiology itself, but the systematic (or, he allows, 'doctrinal') theology, in which it must be embedded, and which, he claims, is best placed to enable an understanding of "the internal divisions within Anglicanism". The crucial point to recognise is that Anglicanism is part of a larger "universal Church of Christ" and Anglicans "have no permission to regard their own communion as somehow immune from the critical questions to which any systematic doctrine of the church must give rise."<sup>75</sup>

So Sykes virtually equates identity and integrity, but in the sense that identity is impossible without some unifying integrity.<sup>76</sup> But is a comprehensive church,<sup>77</sup> in which polar opposite positions are to be found in theology (and much else), incompatible with both? This theological question may be judged to be even sharper today, with the Realist/non-Realist debate,<sup>78</sup> than when Sykes was writing. However, the main thrust is clear: are there any limitations to someone calling themselves a member of the Church (of England)? Are there any definitive criteria for membership?

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<sup>74</sup> Avis (1989) p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> Sykes (1978) p. ix.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 1 is entitled 'The Crisis of Anglican Comprehensiveness'.

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. Cupitt D *Taking Leave of God* London SCM 1980; Crowder C (ed) *God and Reality* London Mowbray 1997; Moore A *Realism and Christian Faith* Cambridge CUP 2003.

Here the notion of comprehensiveness is about theological comprehensiveness, but the principles are broadly relevant to the issue of membership, where there are obvious connections. For example, Sykes, illustrating that the Church of England was never “all-embracing”, cites the fact that

....it was unable to include many of those protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who felt that the Anglican reformation had been incompletely faithful to the scriptures. It still does not contain those who reject episcopacy.....<sup>79</sup>

So there were those who either excluded themselves, or were excluded from membership, because of some hindrance that was judged, either by them, or by the church, to be incompatible with what the Church of England stood for:

Not even the Church of England is as tolerantly comprehensive as an open debating society.....comprehensiveness is, therefore, *per se*, a radically unclear notion, requiring qualification to give it precision.....There is an understandable sensitivity to the suggestion that in Anglicanism anything goes.<sup>80</sup>

Is comprehensiveness a “radically unclear notion”? Perhaps it is simply an inaccurate notion. But even that does not suggest where the lines are to be drawn. However, if (as Sykes) one might find excluded those who take a particular interpretation of the Bible, or those who do not hold with bishops, how much more would one find great difficulty in upholding the membership of someone who does not believe in God or someone who never attends public worship, or someone who sees the church simply as fulfilling their social needs? Sykes examines the notion of Anglican comprehensiveness, and interprets statements from the 1968 Lambeth Conference as saying that the required qualification excludes “views which contradict the fundamentals and views which assert as fundamental matters that which Anglicans hold to be non-fundamental.”<sup>81</sup> Focusing on the former, it would presumably be agreed that atheism (both in theory and practice) and non-worship would “contradict fundamentals”? If the “liberty of interpretation” implicit in

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<sup>79</sup> *Op cit.* p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.



comprehensiveness does actually have limits, then surely those are they? While Sykes rightly suggests that defining fundamentals and non-fundamentals is no straightforward matter, the examples he provides where there might be some doubt do not include the two noted above. It would be surprising if they did. All the more surprising then that these are precisely the criteria which, as we shall see in the following chapters, church schools are being encouraged to waive, at least as instantiated in admission policies.

As we have seen, Sykes believes that there is a distinctive Anglican 'theology of the church' (an ecclesiology) even if in more recent years there has been a failure to take that study particularly seriously. He blames this upon the equal failure within the Church of England to take systematic theology seriously (due to, and/or resulting in, the lack of 'heavy' Anglican theologians in comparison with the likes of Calvin, Luther, Barth etc.), neglect in universities and theological colleges, and the tension between ecclesiastical parties. The fact that central to both Anglican theology and ecclesiology is "toleration of disagreement" should not be seen as problematic. Indeed,

....this toleration itself is a highly significant ecclesiological matter. It is not to be dismissed with contempt as woolly compromise of no theological significance.....that which is carefully left unspecified is left unspecified for reasons which may be bad or good, but....ought to be examined.<sup>82</sup>

As noted above, the issue which appears to have been given little consideration in recent works on ecclesiology, is the (apparently) straightforward question of Christian identity: what actually is a Christian? Whatever else the church is, it is an organisation of people, and so the issue of membership must surely be central?

### **Membership of the Church**

Of course, wrote Bishop Chesters of Blackburn in a Diocesan newsletter,<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85.

<sup>83</sup> 'The See of Blackburn', April 2001.

....the answer is really quite simple. A Christian is one *who believes* Jesus is Lord [and]....If we would come closer to our Lord *we must share in the drama* which the Holy Week and Easter services present. They take us to the heart of what it means to be a Christian.”<sup>84</sup>

The italicised sections suggest that the ‘real’ Christian must not only share a common belief, but must participate in the worship of the church. This first aspect of membership does not, in the Church of England, require affirmation of any particular interpretation of the Christian creeds, just as those subscribing to a particular political party may disagree among themselves on the interpretation of particular ‘doctrines’ (such as the Tory ‘wets’ and ‘drys’ of the ‘80s). Certain disagreements may appear to some to be fundamental.

Keith Ward notes:

When believers say, in a liturgical situation, ‘I believe in God...’, they are not assenting to some philosophical theory or factual proposition. They are saying, ‘I commit myself to membership of the community which shapes its life on this story, as a disclosure of God and a summons to personal redemptive action in the world’.<sup>85</sup>

As in politics (and the comparison has already been made) a line will eventually be drawn somewhere, for if every and any belief were to be compatible with membership of a group which holds a particular set of doctrines as the basis for its values, then that group’s identity would be vacuous. That presumably is why the previous Bishop of Chichester sacked Anthony Freeman;<sup>86</sup> for Dr Kemp, Freeman had gone too far. Even the Labour Party felt obliged to expel its Militants. Other bishops, however, are prepared to allow rather more latitude:

The dismissal of a priest for expressing views that are outside the boundary of what is thought acceptable by his bishop is fortunately very rare. It is, to say the least, an exceptional outworking of any church’s need to have some kind of boundaries around its membership and minimum qualifications for holding office within it.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> My italics.

<sup>85</sup> Ward K (1991) p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> After publication of *God In Us: A Case for Christian Humanism* London SCM Press 1993.

<sup>87</sup> Selby P ‘The Reality of Power and the Power of Reality’ in Crowder C (ed) (1997) p. 77.

That latitude will vary from time to time. There was a time when denying Clause Four would have driven a person out of the Labour Party. The history of the church is replete with condemnations of heretics. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are those who believe that there is an identifiable orthodoxy (particularly on matters of sexuality, over which the Anglican Communion is on the verge of schism), any breach of which ought to lead to expulsion from the church; the Pope still feels able to deny certain Roman Catholic scholars the right to teach. Freeman himself saw the matter differently:

The dispute within the church over non-realism is a particular example of a recurring debate within its life. Is the church to be a closed elite, a chosen few, the storm-troops of the kingdom? Or is it to be a mixed bag, a motley assortment of the good, the bad and the indifferent, all trying in their different ways to make something of their lives in the shadow of the Galilean?<sup>88</sup>

But is it simply a matter of ‘anything goes’? Is it even logical to suggest that the “indifferent” are doing anything at all “in the shadow....”? Freeman here confuses styles of belief where, evidently, membership of the church is still taken seriously (the whole point about Christian non-realism, as opposed to atheism, is that its adherents want to continue to use the language and practices of the church), with a “motley assortment”, many of whom may be indifferent to the church. Ecclesiologically that makes a difference. What appears crucial, for Chesters and Ward, is a commitment to some meaningful and recognisable form of membership. Chesters went on to refer to “those who stand up and are counted as members of the church,” thus implying that there may be other members who do not “stand up” and, therefore, are not “counted”.

So how does one become a member of the Christian Church in general, and of the Anglican Church in particular? The answer, in short, is by baptism, and it is generally accepted, except by those who take an anabaptist view, that baptism into one specific denomination confers membership of the whole church. Furthermore, baptism – admission

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Non-realism and the life of the church’ in Crowder (1997) p. 38.



to the church – provides a useful comparison with admission to the church school. Davie describes baptism as

....a crucial indicator of Anglican penetration, for it permits some measurement – if not an entirely accurate one – of the value placed by the population at large on a ceremony associated with Christian initiation. To be baptised in the Church of England provides at least one criterion used in the self-ascription of membership.<sup>89</sup>

It is indicative of the general misunderstanding of baptism that a sociologist describes it as “*associated with* Christian initiation”. It is more surprising to find a similar view expressed by an Anglican Bishop:

The English people have been encouraged for centuries to bring their children to be baptised. The desire for a clear-cut understanding of Christian commitment leads some clergy to lay down demanding conditions to prove the willingness of parents to come to church before baptising their babies. They do not give much account to the place a believing grandmother may have in the family, or to the inarticulate longings after God of many who cannot think of themselves as churchgoers....Instead [baptism] can be a *helpful stepping stone* which brings a family nearer to the Christian experience and to the Christian fellowship.<sup>90</sup>

Theologically, of course, baptism is the sacramental rite of initiation into Christian faith, hardly an associate or a stepping-stone. Even those who lay great stress on confirmation as completing the Rite, recognise that baptism confers full membership of the church.<sup>91</sup> Davie refers to the notion of “self-ascription of membership”, and there are serious questions regarding why a person may seek baptism. It is, furthermore, a moot point as to whether everyone who brings a child to baptism understands it in terms of membership at all. Many appear to see baptism as simply marking the birth of the child.

Is baptism a sufficient condition of membership, if that membership is never fulfilled practically by joining in the worshipping activities of the church, or even by sharing Christian beliefs? If it is, then it is difficult to resist an interpretation of the sacrament that

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<sup>89</sup> Davie (1994) p. 53.

<sup>90</sup> Sheppard D (1983) pp. 218-219, my italics.

<sup>91</sup> *1 Corinthians* 12: 13.

is mechanistic to the point of being magical: it does not matter what you believe, it does not matter if you live a religious life, so long as the priest has poured water over you and uttered the right ‘incantations’, you are (eternally) a member of the church. That is precisely the view presupposed in the universal church model.

Baptism is a sacrament. The validity of a sacrament has been thought to depend on the fulfilment of three conditions: the use of the right ‘materials’ (water), the use of the correct form of words (the Trinitarian formula), and the right intention. Theologians have argued as to whose intention must be right: the recipient (leading to ‘receptionism’: the idea that the validity of the sacrament depends on the way it is received), that of the minister of the sacrament, or even of the church itself. This was to be the fundamental dilemma: the need to hold in “some kind of tension the action of the church in faithful obedience to the Lord’s command....and faithful reception on the part of the believer,”<sup>92</sup> for “a Christian gospel which is all affection and no demand is flabby, whereas one which is all demand and no affection is exclusive.”<sup>93</sup>

Many Christians would argue that although it is important to trust in God’s sacramental grace, there is enough in the theology of baptism to demonstrate that there are solid grounds for claiming that some human response is necessary:

In baptism God issues the call, makes his claim on us, admits us to his church. Our membership does not depend on the extent of our obedience, although if we do not obey our membership is dormant and may at the end become completely ineffective. Just as our being forgiven depends on God’s act of forgiveness, but we cannot be forgiven if we do not ask for forgiveness, so with our membership of the church: we are baptized into membership of the church and are therefore called to obey God in Christ.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Stevenson K (1998) p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 69.

<sup>94</sup> Hanson AT & RPC (1987) p. 46.

For the Hansons the result of not following through with the baptismal promises is that, although the membership is not ended, it is to be considered “dormant” and so ultimately “ineffective”. Membership that is dormant and ineffective would seem to be little different from no membership at all. An alternative comparison may be made with membership of a health club. The purpose of becoming a member is to pursue activities that lead to health and fitness. If, having purchased membership, the ‘member’ never attends, then not only do they not receive any of the benefits of membership, it is difficult to know in what sense they continue to be members, except that their name will be on a membership list, and (presumably) they continue to pay the subscription. Some Christians may seek to argue that it is enough to have one’s name on the membership list (the ‘Book of Life’ or ‘Roll of the Living’ of Revelation 21: 27?), but to do so is nothing other than to claim that baptism is mechanistic and works *ex opere operato*.

However, human beings “are not ‘*naturaliter christiani*’....Christian by nature,”<sup>95</sup> if we were, there would be no need for baptism at all. It is often suggested that one of the presuppositions of baptism is what has been termed ‘conviction of sin’. This Evangelical expression has a specific meaning in that context, but may be more generally understood as the twin human awareness that not all is well with us, and (therefore) we want to change. Furthermore, to ‘turn away’ from one direction, is to turn towards another. That new life is “a kind of ordination, a call to the lay apostolate, to a share in the general priesthood of the church.”<sup>96</sup> It is also important not to confuse intentionality with a failure to ‘deliver’ what was intended. Discussing the scriptural basis of baptism, the Whiteheads comment on the link with the Jewish Covenant:

The children of Abraham received the sign of circumcision almost from birth because they were part of the people of Israel by virtue of their nationality. This did

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<sup>95</sup> Macquarrie (1997) p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* p. 69.



not guarantee that they would be loyal and faithful men of God....and it is very easy to find stories of those who clearly did not become such paragons of holiness.<sup>97</sup>

In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul assumes that those who are baptised have faith, but still need to be admonished because they do not uphold their baptismal promises.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, although the local congregations get it wrong, they are still congregations. There is a fundamental difference between the failure to live up to what one has genuinely promised, and entering into the rite with no genuine intentions at all.

Yet Article XXV (of the 39 Articles), with its stress on God's grace, seems to require nothing at all of the recipient of baptism:

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.

However, within the BCP liturgy itself we find the following:

This Infant must also faithfully, for his part, promise by you that are his sureties (until he comes of age to take it upon himself) that he will renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy word, and obediently keep his commandments.<sup>99</sup>

The emphasis here is on action following baptism, of which the priest should be assured before baptism is given. This idea is confirmed by the promises made by, or on behalf of, the candidate. What is implicit, however, is that baptism does require some kind of response for it to be 'effectual'. An example of what this might have meant during the early church is found in Mark:

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<sup>97</sup> Whitehead N & H (1998) pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>98</sup> *E.g. 1 Corinthians* 1: 10 – 17.

<sup>99</sup> From the address to the Godparents.

Go forth to every part of the world, and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation. Those who believe it and receive baptism will find salvation; those who do not believe will be condemned.<sup>100</sup>

Here a clear link is made between baptism and the belief which should precede it. Furthermore, it is the one who does not believe who will be “condemned”. Although this gives no guidance as to whether the one who does not believe has been baptised, and has now lost faith, or whether it is meant simply to imply that without belief there will be no baptism, the point would seem clear: it is belief, not the act of baptism itself, that is salvific. In Matthew’s so-called ‘Great Commission’ we find a similar point:

Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptise men in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.<sup>101</sup>

Although the emphasis is different: orthopraxis as opposed to orthodoxy, the thrust is the same. Baptism requires a response.

Baptism was originally restricted to adult converts; this

....is the norm, in the sense that it provides the data for a theological understanding of what baptism is essentially trying to express and to effect.<sup>102</sup>

Some regard Jewish proselyte baptism as the most significant antecedent. Where a gentile who wished to be admitted to the Jewish faith had children, they would be admitted as well. It followed naturally for children born of parents who were already Christians to be identified with the faith of their parents through baptism,<sup>103</sup> but the faith of the parents was primary, and it was customary for the decisions of the head of the family to be binding on the whole. As late as the third century adult baptism was the norm, although

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<sup>100</sup> *Mark* 16: 15 – 16.

<sup>101</sup> *Matthew* 28: 19.

<sup>102</sup> Macquarrie (1997) p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> The case is argued by Jeremias J (1960) *passim*.

....the evidence does not show whether this practice was universal or whether Christian parents could without censure postpone the baptism of their children to maturer years. Towards the middle of the fourth century...the baptism of children, apart from emergency baptisms, seems to have become the exception....Towards the end of the fourth century there begins to be a return to the practice of child-baptism.<sup>104</sup>

Theologically, at least in the West, the emphasis on Christian initiation became diluted, with the separation of baptism and confirmation which

....was originally made on the grounds of expediency, but in due course it came to be felt that, because confirmation was not normally administered to infants, it was right that it should not be.....first communion was also deferred until the age of discretion...<sup>105</sup>

There was also a significant change in theological focus: whereas the original *raison d'être* for baptism was initiation, and both practice and theology assumed the active participation of converts, the anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine laid stress on baptism as the 'cure' for the guilt of original sin, for "if we are born with no sin, why is it that people rush with infants to baptism for their release from it?"<sup>106</sup> Wright argued that there is sufficient evidence "to conclude that, until the latter years of the first decade of the fifth century, Augustine too worked with adult baptism....as the norm, [and that] the baptizing of infants was...far more minimal and marginal, at least in the West, than is often assumed".<sup>107</sup> If baptism was the only 'cure' for original sin, then it should be administered as early as possible. With the emphasis more pathological and less ritualistic, it shifted the focus from adult to infant baptism. There was no longer any need to wait for adult commitment; indeed, it was unwise to wait, for if the child died in sin, the outcome could not bear contemplation.

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<sup>104</sup> Yarnold E J 'Initiation: The Fourth and Fifth Centuries' in C Jones et al (eds) (1978) pp. 95–96.

<sup>105</sup> Dixon N (1979) p. 38.

<sup>106</sup> Augustine *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 4.11; quoted in Wright DF 'Augustine and the Transformation of Baptism', in A Kreider (ed) (2001) p. 303.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 304.



The liturgical separation of baptism and confirmation effectively split the rite into two, and in the CE confirmation eventually became the rite by which people were admitted to the Eucharist. This placed less stress on baptism requiring commitment, for that could come ‘when the child is ready’ – at confirmation; but it was often the case that families approached confirmation with as little seriousness as they approached baptism, and there are those who even see the requirement of baptism itself for the reception of communion as the kind of barrier that Jesus came to break down.<sup>108</sup> The link between confirmation and permission to receive communion itself put pressure on churches to present children for confirmation early in case they ceased church attendance before they reached the age for confirmation, and were effectively denied entry to communion (because only the few very committed would seek confirmation – commonly understood as a rite of puberty – as an adult). The move of the Church of England in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century to enable children who are baptised but not yet confirmed to receive communion has begun to restore the emphasis on baptism as the rite by which one joins the church. What effect that will have on confirmation, should the practice become widespread, remains to be seen.

When in the early church the head of a household embraced the Christian Faith, it often entailed the baptism of everyone who lived and worked in the house, servants and slaves included. In Acts 16 stories are told of a female trader who was baptised “and her household with her”,<sup>109</sup> and of a jailer who was baptised “with his whole family”.<sup>110</sup> In both cases it is implied that the conversion was that of the key individual, rather than of the household as a whole – the jailer “rejoiced with his whole household in *his* [not their] new-found faith in God”. It was the baptism of the head of the house that was primary, and it was their genuine desire for baptism that brought it about; the rest followed. The others’ baptism was dependent and secondary.

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<sup>108</sup> See Moeller L ‘Baptism: Rite of Inclusion or Exclusion?’ in PV Marshall & LA Northup (eds) (1997) pp. 81 – 92.

<sup>109</sup> Acts 16: 14 – 15.

<sup>110</sup> Acts 16: 33 – 34.

By the time the Christian Faith had become embedded in Medieval Western society, the practice of baptism for all, adult and child, was inevitable. The church-state link (the pre-Reformation universal church model) affected the development of both practice and theology. When Clovis began his conquest of Gaul in the late 5<sup>th</sup> Century, his own baptism proved enormously significant as a political act.<sup>111</sup> Religion, with its power to bind, was too important to be left to personal choice. In fact, the only choice offered by Emperor Charlemagne was baptism or execution! It is a relatively short step from this political principle to religious observance becoming a social imperative, and for a rite of passage such as baptism to enter into the normal mores of a people. As Southern remarks: "The identification of the church with the whole of organised society is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the Middle Ages from earlier *and later* periods of history."<sup>112</sup>

Considerable theological and ecclesiological complications were generated by such a close relationship of a religious rite with society:

...Anglicans blend into contemporary society with such ease that the rites of baptism cannot help but seem empty and impotent.....[but] baptism is not just weakened by human failings; it comes to be seen as the very source of the church's woes.<sup>113</sup>

Throughout most of the Christian centuries, the church has reasonably been able to assume that parents who presented their children for baptism were Christian, even if not everyone was a particularly 'good' Christian. That is certainly not an assumption that can be made today:

....there are at the moment millions of baptized persons, baptized years ago in infancy, who have not the faintest existential notion of the worship, fellowship, service and mission involved in the Christian life; and the denominations of today add to their future number by continuing to baptize as infants people who stand perhaps even less chance of coming to personal commitment.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Moss H St. L B (1935) p. 64.

<sup>112</sup> Southern RW (1970) p. 16, my italics.

<sup>113</sup> Reno RR 'Towards a Postliberal Ecclesial Spirituality', *The Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol. 1.1 August 2003, p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Wainwright G (1969) p. 72.



For many, baptism is their first and last involvement with the church. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 was well aware of the problems of 'social' baptism:

While deprecating the hasty adoption of any policy which would lead to widespread exclusion of infants from Baptism, the Conference affirms that the service of infant Baptism pre-supposes that the infant will be brought up in the faith and practice of the church....<sup>115</sup>

In a society where all were considered members of the church, infant baptism was not only unexceptional, it was virtually a requirement "as involuntary as birth, and it carried with it obligations as binding and permanent as birth into a modern state, with the further provision that the obligations attached to baptism could in no circumstances be renounced."<sup>116</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the medieval pattern was well established: "baptism was primarily for those in infancy, and parents were expected to have the children baptised",<sup>117</sup> and right up to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, baptism was for most English people not only a normal social expectation, but one that did not seem to entail any further obligations. Writing in the early 1970s, Osborn comments on

....the extraordinarily important part which Baptism still plays in the life of an average English home.....Families which, for one reason or another, have omitted to have their children baptized are anxious to remedy the deficiency (*sic*).<sup>118</sup>

That there were a variety of different reasons for this, some superstitious (baptism seen as a kind of spiritual inoculation or 'insurance policy'), goes some way to explaining why for many today, the church is still expected to provide this 'service', and why those who do not receive it are seen as somehow 'deficient'.

Many Christians are not in favour of general baptism at all. One polemical work actually goes so far as to conclude:

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<sup>115</sup> Resolution 104, Lambeth Conference 1948; quoted in Evans and Wright (1991) p. 423.

<sup>116</sup> Southern RW (1970) p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> Stevenson K (1998) p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> Osborn RR (1972) p. 1.



First [the reader] will see that the baptism he may have received as a child is not Christian baptism, and therefore he must needs be baptised as a professed believer if he is to keep the ordinance of Christ.....Secondly, he will realise that he cannot continue as a Christian worker or minister in any church or denomination which makes infant baptism obligatory. It is a great pity that the Church of England for all its boasted comprehensiveness cannot embrace those unable to do such a small thing as baptise babies.<sup>119</sup>

While it would be difficult for an Anglican to totally disagree with infant baptism, for it is a significant Christian and Anglican tradition, there are many who are unhappy about unqualified general or, as it is sometimes and somewhat pejoratively called, ‘indiscriminate’, baptism. These would argue that there ought to be at least some criteria which families should have to meet and these are implicit in the liturgy. In fact, it has been argued that

...infant baptism is extremely unlikely to lead towards a mature understanding of and participation in the Christian life for a child whose parents do not attach any importance to belonging to the church and who therefore receives no Christian teaching....has none of the advantages of a Christian environment in the home, and who is not encouraged in any way to look to the Christian community for nurture.<sup>120</sup>

Where the Baptised are too young to make that commitment for themselves, the Rite is explicit in requiring appropriate commitment, encouragement and example, from parents and godparents:

Parents and godparents, the church receives these children with joy. Today we are trusting God for their growth in faith. Will you pray for them, *draw them by your example into the community of faith* and walk with them in the way of Christ?.....Will you care for them, and help them take their place within the life and worship of Christ’s church?<sup>121</sup>

As they grow up, they will need the help and encouragement of the Christian community, so that they may *learn to know God in public worship and private prayer*.....<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Watson TE (1962).

<sup>120</sup> Dixon (1979) p. 104.

<sup>121</sup> Formal question to parents and godparents in the revised baptismal rite, (2000) *Common Worship*, p. 352, my italics, although it may be noted that following criticisms made of the original CW Baptismal Rite (*Common Worship: Holy Baptism* 1998) the CE Liturgical Commission made provision for the arguably weaker, ASB, form to be used “where there are strong pastoral reasons” *Ibid.* p. 353.

<sup>122</sup> *ASB* (1980) version, p. 243, my italics.

Further questions ensure that the parents and godparents make explicit their own Christian commitment:

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour....Do you submit to Christ as Lord....Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?<sup>123</sup>

There is no way that such questions could be misunderstood. They require affirmation of a faith commitment. Neither is there any flexibility in the answers:

I turn to Christ....I submit to Christ.....I come to Christ.

Only these answers are permitted; parents and godparents are not permitted to qualify what they say. Presumably, if they tried to do so, the baptism could not go ahead for it is dependent on the correct answers being given. That will create a dilemma for parents who are not committed Christians, and who have brought their child to baptism primarily for social reasons. Either they do not proceed to baptism, and although the Church of England offers a rite of thanksgiving that would seem to provide what they are after, for many parents (brought up on the tradition of 'christenings') it is not the 'real thing'; or they proceed and are placed in the impossible position of making false statements in public, not simply on their own behalf, but on behalf of their child.

Of course, as Dixon points out:

We are bound to admit....that it is impossible to judge the extent of another's faith....[however] the level of the parents' commitment to the Body of Christ can be estimated in an objective way.<sup>124</sup>

Furthermore, there are reasonable conclusions which might be drawn from that "objective" assessment. Despite the fact that western culture is individualistic, and some believe religion to be a purely private matter, the Christian Faith has an essential corporate

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<sup>123</sup> *Common Worship* p. 353.

<sup>124</sup> Dixon (1979) p. 127.

dimension, associated with the notion of the 'Body of Christ'.<sup>125</sup> If there is no family commitment to that Body, then two conclusions may be drawn. The first is practical: a lack of any prior commitment to joining the worshipping body of the church does not augur well for the child's future involvement, concerning which the family has made explicit promises. Secondly, if there is no commitment to the worshipping Body, what does that suggest about the nature of a person's Christian faith, as traditionally understood?

There is also a dilemma for the local congregation, for they also have a nurturing role. They promise ("with the help of God") to uphold the children in their "new life in Christ". If they never see the children again, then that will be impossible, and that places them in the position of promising something they simply cannot deliver. Again they have little choice but to respond in the prescribed words. It would certainly be embarrassing if, when the parish priest asked the question, there was a total silence. Some have argued that the faith of the congregation can, in some way, 'make up for' the faith, or lack of it, of the parents. That is difficult to comprehend, unless it also implies a mechanistic view of the sacrament. The church may well make every effort to keep in touch and encourage the family. But in the last analysis it is the parent who brings up the child, and if they are not prepared to take the promises they have made seriously, then it is unlikely that they will co-operate with the efforts of the church to help them. It is to be hoped that congregations will continue to pray for those baptised in their midst, and who knows what the outcome of such prayer might be? But unless there is some kind of direct involvement in the nurture of the child, it is difficult to see how the congregation can compensate. Examples provided by the New Testament show that where vicarious faith is involved, it is always that of a person close to the individual being baptised.

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<sup>125</sup> E.g. *1 Corinthians* 12: 14 – 27.



The church.....can only grant baptism if at least one of the child's parents avows belief in the Lord's promise. In the perspective of the covenant the baptism of the child is truly what it claims to be only if faith is present in the family that demands it. the faith of the church cannot make up for the absence of faith in the parents.<sup>126</sup>

Indeed, a principal feature of baptism is "that the person baptized is brought into a new community, and that person's being is now lived in this new community. It even claims to be a new humanity."<sup>127</sup> Again, we see the communal nature of the Christian faith; the need for the baptised member to recognise his/her responsibilities within the church. This is emphasised by the parochial structure of the Church of England. The expectation is that a child will be baptised in the home parish, or the parish where the family worship, if that is not the 'home' parish. The point of this is to enable the local Christian community to support the parents in carrying out their responsibilities for Christian nurture.<sup>128</sup> If the child is, for whatever reason, not to be baptised in their own parish, it is the further expectation that the proposed minister of the sacrament will consult the parish priest of the home parish. Experience would seem to suggest that such 'professional courtesies' are not always carried out. It often seems to be the case that parents will 'shop around'! Some clergy will make it very easy for baptisms to be administered, while other make it much harder, insisting on 'preparation classes'. If parents simply want the child 'done' and have little concern for the theological niceties, then they may gravitate to what the parental grapevine identifies as the 'easy' churches. That is why some parishes have large numbers of baptisms, and others, although reflecting the same kind of population, have far fewer. If the family does not attend church, then they will see no reason why the baptism should be held in their home parish. Parents may approach a particular church because it was the church where they were married, or it has other family connections.

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<sup>126</sup> Marcel P (1953) p. 234.

<sup>127</sup> Macquarrie (1997) p. 74.

<sup>128</sup> A similar notion – the self-knowledge of a local community – lies behind the reading of Banns of marriage; it is noteworthy that the CE has made proposals to end this practice, simply because it is based on an anachronistic sense of community and the role of the church within it.

The fundamental problem of baptism having become almost entirely a social affair, is that its whole *raison d'être* is lost. Even if there are “inarticulate longings” (Sheppard again)<sup>129</sup> on the part of those who seek baptism for their children – in other words they do not precisely know why they want it, they are just convinced that there is something important about it (and that is not in itself an unworthy position) - unless those longings lead to effectual Christian experience and formation (which surely must include worship?), the notion of the act of baptism itself being all-sufficient becomes ecclesologically problematic.

It may seem strange that people who choose not to live a religious life themselves want to have their child baptised, and herein lies the real problem. The way Christian history is bound into English social history means that there remains for many a vestigial sense of belonging to the church:

The empty pews of every church are ‘filled’ by people who identify themselves with a particular denomination, or in a local community with an actual building, even though the pews remain empty. The vast majority of the population still identify themselves with a particular denomination.<sup>130</sup>

If there was a “vast majority” in the mid-1970s, it is likely to be considerably smaller today. Christian rites of passage have inevitably made a deep impression on national life, and while fewer people will be married in church today, still a vast majority will be buried or cremated with some kind of Christian ceremony. There will be all kinds of reasons for this, many generated by folk religion: the desire to involve God in something important, just in case there is a God; the vague wish that the power or meaning which pervades the universe give his/her/its blessing; perhaps even just for good luck. Of course, just because people cannot articulate why they want the ritual, does not of itself make it wrong for them to have it. However, many hold quite sub-Christian notions of which they need to be

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<sup>129</sup> *Op cit* pp. 218-219.

<sup>130</sup> Lampard JS (1975) p. 76.



disabused,<sup>131</sup> and “the extent to which such notions survive, even among young parents in our modern ‘technological’ society is both surprising and alarming.” One may be tempted to laugh at such superstitions, but to do so would be to devalue beliefs which are often genuinely held. Nevertheless, it cannot but seem bad faith simply to continue to offer baptism.

Of course, to refuse it, apart from offending Canon Law is to cause offence to those seeking baptism.

Many parents assume that they have an inalienable right to have children baptized on demand<sup>132</sup> and greatly resent being subjected to any sort of pre-baptismal preparation.....[But] if parents are unwilling to undergo this very basic preparation, the seriousness of their desire to have their child baptized is open to question.<sup>133</sup>

Very often the problem is not so much parents refusing to take part in preparation, but agreeing simply in order to achieve an end result. It is at this point that we may make a direct comparison with application for church schools; there are some parents who will jump through whatever ‘hoops’ are required in order to achieve the aim of having their child admitted. Even if this means attending church. Here the actual commitment is often far greater than anything required for baptism.<sup>134</sup> Further, the failure of so many families to take seriously, or even to recognise, the nurturative commitments of baptism is perhaps symptomatic of a general view (not restricted to the laity); one which underplays the value of Christian nurture in school in favour of a generalised quasi-religiosity. I develop this theme further below.

There is little doubt that many such families would consider themselves to be Christian (‘you can be a Christian and not go to church’) and further consider that they have the right

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<sup>131</sup> Dixon (1979) p. 109.

<sup>132</sup> Which technically, in the CE, they do – Dixon is a Methodist.

<sup>133</sup> Dixon (1979) p. 132.

<sup>134</sup> As noted by Waddington (1984) p. 63.



to have their child baptised. Even parents who do not attend church will often express the view that they want their child to have a religious upbringing; they see little contradiction with their own practice, nor do they intend to change it. Many feel that their child will get enough 'religious instruction' at school (and perhaps that is why they seek a church school?); some may even drop the child off at Sunday School.

There is undoubtedly a dichotomy between the church's understanding of what it means to be a Christian and that of the community at large.....A man who performs a kindly deed may well be told that he has done a Christian act....He may be a Jew or a Muslim or a Buddhist or an atheist...<sup>135</sup>

Clergy who take a less rigorous line when offering baptism often argue that, despite theological difficulties, there are pastoral benefits which outweigh them, such as being able to maintain contact with a family, or honouring a past family connection with the church. Dixon believes that to argue the pastoral case over the theological is "indefensible", and concludes that "non-practising Christians must be prevented from presenting their children for baptism, whether by discussion or outright refusal."<sup>136</sup> This is a matter of principle. Nevertheless, there are also, he argues, pragmatic reasons: it seems clear that the present practice of administering baptism "fairly indiscriminately" has been "singularly unsuccessful in drawing families into the life of the church."<sup>137</sup> It also leads to a lack of respect for the sacraments on the part of the family, and confusion about the church's mission on the part of the congregation, who seldom, if ever, see the family again – 'what has it been all about?' He also quotes some remarkable success stories arising from a more rigorous approach.

There is a tremendous diversity of baptismal practice in the Church of England, so making attempts to define Anglican identity is problematic. Formally baptism is open to all, virtually unconditionally:

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<sup>135</sup> Dixon (1979) p. 110.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 134.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

No Minister shall refuse or delay to christen any child, according to the form of the Book of Common Prayer, that is brought to the church to him upon Sunday or Holy-days to be christened...And if he shall refuse to christen....he shall be suspended by the Bishop of the diocese from his ministry for a space of three months.<sup>138</sup>

Similar sentiments are to be found in the rubric found within the Book of Common Prayer:

No Minister shall refuse, or, save for the purposes of preparing or instructing the parents or guardians or godparents, delay to baptize any infant within his cure that is brought to church to be baptized, provide that due notice has been given, and the provisions relating to godparents are observed. If the Minister shall refuse or unduly delay to baptize any such Infant, the parents or guardians may apply to the Bishop of the diocese who shall, after consultation with the Minister, give such direction as he thinks fit.<sup>139</sup>

Even though there are some caveats here, they are ultimately not sustainable. The Minister must, in the end, baptise, although some clergy place so many hurdles in the way, that baptism may ultimately be denied those who do not meet the criteria laid down. Other clergy take the opposite view.

It is sometimes denied that such a thing as indiscriminate baptism occurs.<sup>140</sup> However, empirical investigation in most towns would soon identify churches where there are few, if any, 'conditions' laid down; where all the parent has to do is to 'apply' and baptism will be carried out. Even if in such cases there is a conversation in which the priest seeks to explain the meaning of baptism, there is no obligation on the parent to do anything other than listen. Some parish priests insist that parents (and sometimes godparents, where this is practical) attend courses of preparation, but again it is the attendance, other than any commitment beyond baptism, that is the 'hoop' through which the family has to 'jump'. It is Habgood's view that this is likely to be "a deterrent to those whose request is merely frivolous";<sup>141</sup> others might find it no deterrent at all for people determined to have their

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<sup>138</sup> *Canon 68 of the 1603 Canons*, quoted in Bursell RDH (1996) p. 132.

<sup>139</sup> Preface to the Rite of '*Ministration of Public Baptism of Infants*'.

<sup>140</sup> E.g. Green in Sedgwick (ed) (1995), p. 87, or Habgood (1988) p. 214; the arguments for an 'open' baptismal policy are set out well by Whitehead N&H (1998) pp. 18–21.

<sup>141</sup> Habgood (1988) p. 216.



child baptised. There are some parishes where the clergy take a much tougher stance. In the end they may refuse to baptise unless they are assured of the genuineness of the family commitment. In so doing, of course, they run the risk (such as it may be) of episcopal discipline; or, more likely, the parents will go elsewhere.

Having considered the arguments for and against the varying practices to be found in the Church of England, the Whiteheads conclude:

In the end, perhaps, we need to remind ourselves of two important things: it is the church which serves the world rather than the other way round; and sacraments are given through God's grace, not ours.<sup>142</sup>

This summary exemplifies the confusion inherent in this debate as much as in the church school debate: that between service and membership. Their argument appears to be: because it is the mission of the church to serve, it should offer baptism as part of that service. That is to put the cart before the horse, and yet again assumes a somewhat mechanistic interpretation of the sacraments: that they are to be dispensed by the church on behalf of God, almost as a Father Christmas distributes presents, or as a doctor dispenses medicines. The church does not take the same view regarding the sacramental bread and wine. If baptism confers membership of the serving church, then it is clear that to offer baptism as part of that service is misguided. One would not immediately offer membership of the Samaritans to someone who has just telephoned that organisation for help. It is the function of the Samaritans to help people in distress; those who offer the service are those who have joined the organisation. Perhaps a sharper analogy would be to offer a customer in a restaurant the chance to be a waiter! It is because the church effectively fails to make clear what baptism is all about that the misunderstandings arise.

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<sup>142</sup> *Op cit.* p. 20.



A particularly instructive example of the way some families signally fail to grasp what baptism is about is to be found in the choice of godparents. It is a requirement that godparents are themselves baptised (how can you ‘sponsor’ someone for membership of a ‘club’ of which you yourself are not a member?) and preferably confirmed – in mature membership. In my own experience preparing families for baptism, it is seldom the case that godparents are chosen for their qualities of spiritual guidance (so that they can assist the parents in the task of nurturing the child in the Faith), but more often for a host of other reasons, including the legally dubious task of caring for the child should the parents die! Godparents are frequently chosen because they are friends or relatives; indeed, parents often speak of family expectations that ‘uncle’ should be chosen; and on one occasion a most unlikely choice (in the context of Christian baptism) was a Hindu.

Habgood sees the whole concept of infant baptism as representative of “family and community solidarity” while the baptism of adults reflects “an ideal of individual choice”. This, however, is to simplify the issues rather too much, and (perhaps understandably in what was a brief Diocesan Letter)<sup>143</sup> ignores much of the historical and theological development of baptism. Presumably there are not two kinds of baptism: one for adults, and a somewhat watered down version for children. The concept of “family and community solidarity”, in the context of baptism, raises questions about the nature of that family and that community. Both make sense only as either an explicitly Christian family or community or (possibly) in a universal church or ecclesia/church situation. Habgood would probably argue that the Church of England meets the criteria for the latter. The questions become more sharply focused when one considers “the ideal of individual choice”. Is not choice an essential part of any religious commitment? Does not baptism require a person, or their surrogate, to make an active choice?<sup>144</sup> If baptism is entry to the

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<sup>143</sup> Reproduced in Habgood (1988) pp. 214 – 216.

<sup>144</sup> *E.g. Acts 8: 37.*

Christian life, a life that is lived in a particular way, then the answers must be in the affirmative.

Diverse baptismal practice may be thought to be representative of particular foci within the church. Habgood locates two extremes:

The extreme communal end of the scale being represented by Eastern Orthodoxy which also practises infant Communion. At the extreme Protestant end of the scale individualism becomes so interiorized, as in the Society of Friends, that adult baptism gives place to no baptism at all.<sup>145</sup>

Within the Church of England one might expect the Evangelical to lay stress on the absolute need for personal choice and commitment, while the Catholic with a high view of the sacraments would be more inclined to general baptism. To draw such hard and fast conclusions would not be accurate. Osborn, who argued so strongly in favour of infant baptism, was a member of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement.

Habgood also writes of a “missiological scale” (alongside a “churchmanship scale”). Here he cites a typical Anglican parish church as one which is “very much part of the local community, distinct from it but responsible to it, and with plenty of interchange across the boundaries.” This implies, he argues, a “generous policy” towards baptisms. The ‘less generous’ policy would come from (Habgood implies) an untypical parish church, which sees itself as a ‘fellowship of believers’ (as opposed to a fellowship of unbelievers?). He comments:

It is easy to see why, in difficult times, this latter understanding of the church is gaining ground. But it does so at the cost of unchurcing large numbers of people whose faith does not take the required form, and alienating those who, given some encouragement, might have retained at least a tenuous sense that the church is for them too.....My own belief is that we must not be mean about the sacraments, not treat them as prizes for good behaviour<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Op cit.* p. 215.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216.



While this recognises that there is some kind of change underway in people's understanding of the Church of England – a change that might be described as making the Church of England more 'denominational' – Habgood clearly regrets it. It is a change that will 'unchurch' people. We have seen that the notion of being 'unchurched' is also used by Davie. The prefix 'un' suggests negating an activity: the 'undo' function on a word processor enables the operator to wipe out the previous input and restore the text to what it was; to 'unseat' a rider is to knock them off their mount; an 'unwary' person is one who is not aware of the danger they might be in. Therefore, to 'unchurch' someone would seem strictly to involve removing them from membership of the church. That is clearly not what is happening in the above context.

Firstly, the move to create what Habgood describes as a "community of believers" is not a process which removes anyone from anything; at worst it is setting some parameters around membership – in effect, making membership less 'easy' than it was. Secondly, if people are not already members of the church, or if baptised, not practising members, then again, no one is 'unchurching' them: in the first instance they are being told: 'you are welcome to become a member, but membership means doing/believing this'; in the second, they have already, in this sense, unchurched themselves. What Habgood, and others who use the term, seem to mean is that the process of taking church membership seriously is a hindrance to those who do not. That implicitly accepts that it is perfectly reasonable not to take church membership seriously. More to the point, they are failing to recognise that the past situation where everyone in England was a 'member' (practising or not) of the Church of England has now passed.

Habgood also refers to those "whose faith does not take the required form" and those who, "might have retained at least a tenuous sense that the church is for them too". We should recall that the subject of Habgood's criticisms is a (more) rigorous baptismal policy which,



in his view, leads to these outcomes. Furthermore, what is to be made of Habgood's plea for greater generosity with the sacraments? Suffice it to say that Habgood's comments imply a very weak definition of 'Christian': s/he does not have to believe or do much, or indeed anything, distinctive. Furthermore, as noted, he is not the only one to confuse church membership with Christian service: the church he claims, is to be "for" people. That is an unexceptionable statement. But does it require membership to be available on demand? Is it really being "mean" for the church to say: 'if you wish to be a Christian, this is what it involves'? With an ecclesiology like that represented by Habgood's comments which encourage a diluted Christianity (not least, with Habgood having been Archbishop of York), no wonder the Church of England appears to have lost its way.

A way forward is offered by Philip Crowe, in a small book designed to be given to prospective parents and godparents. He recognises the importance of celebrating birth; it is a natural human desire, both individual and social, to want to do so. He further recognises that for the English, the traditional way of doing so has been to bring the baby to church for christening:

The simple ritual of promise and prayer, naming and sprinkling, service and party, has been carried out for millions of babies, each one individually the focus of the dreams and hopes of the parents.<sup>147</sup>

However, times have changed. We live in an age where most people are no longer familiar with the rites and practices of the Church of England; when people are not as 'naturally' theistic in their beliefs as they once were; and when the church itself has come to take more seriously what it is doing when it administers the sacraments. The result is that many people are embarrassed and uncertain when they are asked to make explicit assertions of Christian commitment, and are simply bewildered when the baptism is placed in the midst of the Eucharist.

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<sup>147</sup> Crowe P (1980) p. 14.

Crowe also refers to the Jewish tradition where children joined the covenant people as of right; but where the onus was on the parents to bring the child up as a member of that community. Certainly in New Testament times there would have been no concept of a Jewish child not being raised a Jew. It was this understanding that led, quite unexceptionably, to the baptism of children of Christian parents. Crowe concludes that

....the baptism of children, if it is to be genuine Christian baptism, depends wholly on the faith of the parents....<sup>148</sup>

But what makes a Christian family? For many today the ascription 'Christian' is used to designate those who are good, caring and helpful to others. As Astley notes:

Richard Hoggart's account of working-class culture in the 1950s reveals an identification of Christianity with a rather undemanding type of kindness.<sup>149</sup>

It is a moral rather than a theological ascription; the theology, continues Astley, is "thin, and kept very much in the background so as to avoid 'enthusiasm'." However common this belief, it is, Crowe claims, simply wrong:

The word Christian, in its original and only useful meaning, indicates someone who accepts Christian teaching, is baptised and shares in the life of the church. It is a clear factual description.<sup>150</sup>

The implications for baptism are clear: it is "the beginning of Christian life, the means whereby people become part of God's church."<sup>151</sup> It may well be that some people who do not attend church are 'better people' than some who do, but they are not 'better Christians', for being a Christian involves active membership of the church.

Above all else, the church is a community of worship, and it is through worship that people are changed.....to be a Christian alone, never worshipping or serving God with people outside one's own family...is hardly possible.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>149</sup> 'Non-realism for beginners?' in Crowder (1997) p. 101.

<sup>150</sup> *Op cit.* p. 24.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 26 – 27.



Indeed, the welcoming which follows the baptism is nonsense if there is no further contact with the welcoming community, and

....the service creates the illusion that the children belong to God in his church when in fact they do not. Plainly, to baptise babies who are not the children of Christian parents is a most damaging abuse of Christian baptism.<sup>153</sup>

Even so, he does not feel that it is necessary to abandon infant baptism altogether, or to refuse it unless there is some clear evidence of family commitment. In such circumstances, he feels that baptism is not completely meaningless. It can

....stand as a sign of the great truth that God loves us even before we love him, that he has made it possible for us to receive forgiveness and new birth, and that his love longs for us to respond and begin life with him [and it] does at least raise the flag of truth in the family. It shows where they belong, even if they are not actually there....Nothing happens but the key is there.<sup>154</sup>

This conclusion, though, seems at odds with his argument. It might appear that Crowe's evident pastoral concerns are blurring his theological judgement.

Baptism may well be an effective sign of God's love, but is it the appropriate method for telling people that God loves them? Baptism is more appropriately seen as the response to the Christian Gospel, as it was for the Ethiopian in Acts 8, rather than an indication that God wants people to respond. Yet again, baptism is the vehicle by which people "receive forgiveness and new birth" rather than simply an 'advertisement' for it. To see baptism as a "key" to Christian life is quite reasonable, but it is intended to be a key that is used, rather than one to be put aside for possible use at sometime in the future. Finally, of course, the stark statement that "nothing happens" at a baptism (where family faith is absent) would seem to make the sacrament no sacrament at all. Whereas some would wish to rule out the need for a human response, this would seem also to rule out any divine initiative. Of

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85.



course, the issue as to 'what happens' continues to provoke quite differing responses from theologians.

The fundamental problem for the Church of England is summed up by John Habgood:

The main area of debate is in the middle ground between the advocates of generous and rigorous baptism policies, and it is here that we need to develop mutual understanding and to take a long view of the effects of different policies on the church....Baptism policies not only affect the church; they also affect different understandings of it...<sup>155</sup>

Indeed, they are ecclesologically central. The fact that some clergy restrict baptism to the children of active church attenders, does raise the question of whether they are right to do so, as does the opposite question whether virtually indiscriminate baptism is justifiable?

At its best, infant baptism affirms that the child is a member of the church from the start of its life....At its worst, infant baptism can become quite separated from any notion of life in the kingdom of God, or of discipleship.<sup>156</sup>

Both practices, and the various positions between them, raise questions about the nature of the church. On the one hand membership is so diffuse, and so easy to gain, that one can only wonder what it means to be a Christian. On the other hand, membership becomes more restricted so that the notion of a national church becomes equally meaningless.

The implications are serious for the identity of the Church of England. If being a member of that church is simply a matter of being English, then that would seem to remove any content of any religious value from the concept of being Christian. There is a further danger: the development of an understanding that there are two kinds of Christian (implicitly of equal value): those who take being a Christian seriously, and those who do not. The concept of being Christian will be emptied of any real meaning.

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<sup>155</sup> Habgood (1988) p. 215.

<sup>156</sup> Strange WA (1996) p. 115.

Perhaps the church has begun to recover from nominalism, and is in the process of rediscovering a vocation to which its members actively respond, rather than seeing baptism simply as a rite of passage:

Like the early church, Christianity is again in the position of being a real choice, rather than something that one does, at least half-heartedly and on occasion, as an expected prerequisite for being an upstanding citizen. As religiosity diminishes and pluralism expands in our culture, those who attend church will increasingly be those who follow the path of Jesus intentionally and seriously. The church may become smaller, but more focused.<sup>157</sup>

Of course, it is often the case that emotionally charged terms are introduced into the debate. The Labour Government has made much of the concept of ‘inclusion’: it is ‘a good thing’ to include people; it is ‘a bad thing’ to exclude them. Similarly, it is argued: the church should be inclusive. Yet the church never actively seeks to exclude: “Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples....”<sup>158</sup> is the command, but is it the mission of the church simply to include people regardless of belief or practice?

There appear to be two polar ecclesiological positions within the Church of England. One sees membership in the broadest possible terms (evidently not as a universal church, but certainly the ‘ecclesia’-type), while the other places clear parameters around it, as with a denomination. The former may be usefully termed the ‘church for the nation’ model (where the Parish provides a territorial community focus), the latter the ‘gathered church’ model.

### **Church for the Nation**

The Report *Faith in the City*<sup>159</sup> had a tremendous influence on the Church of England’s thinking about and action in the inner-cities.

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<sup>157</sup> Taylor B (1996) p. 22.

<sup>158</sup> *Matthew* 28: 19.

<sup>159</sup> Church House Publishing (1985).



The church does not have particular competence or a distinguished record in proposing social reforms; but the Church of England has presence in all the UPAs, and a responsibility to bring their needs to the attention of the nation. If our Report has a distinctive stance, it arises from our determination to investigate the urban situation by bringing to bear upon it those basic Christian principles of justice and compassion which we believe we share with the great majority of the people of Britain.<sup>160</sup>

Such an approach and assessment clearly arises out of what has been termed the ‘Social Gospel’: the imperative to care for the poor and distressed. However, it has proven to be a short step from the notion of the church having a “presence” within the inner-city, with a mission to service there, to the assumption that the church and the inner-city (in particular) are somehow the same thing, even though the Report stated explicitly: “[the church] often threatened, often struggling for survival, often alienated from the community it seeks to serve, it is often also intensely alive, proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel more authentically than in many parts of ‘comfortable Britain’.” The church is *there* in the inner city to serve those who live there, but is implicitly separate from it. However, a later Report<sup>161</sup> blurred the boundaries: “The urban church must be who it is called to be so that we all may know our identity as a national church - one that commands respect and authority from all in our land.”<sup>162</sup> The concept of a ‘national church’ is clearly an inclusive model, where everyone is, at least potentially, in membership and is the traditional understanding of the nature of the Church of England.

So in the ‘church for the nation’ model, the Church of England is “the church of the English people....the sort of ordinary people who gladly listened to Jesus.”<sup>163</sup> These are further defined as “those who simply put ‘C of E’ on the hospital admission form.” Winter actually criticises the Baptismal rite on the grounds that it is “not friendly to the fringer and

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xiii – xiv.

<sup>161</sup> (1995) *Staying in the City: Faith in the City ten years on*, Church House Publishing .

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* p. vii.

<sup>163</sup> Winter D (1998) article on the then new CE Baptismal Rite for the magazine ‘Celebrate’, Issue 2, Aug/Sept 1998, p. 46.



outsider, but strictly for members of the *cult*.”<sup>164</sup> However, this is to eschew analysis for romance, and to engage in anachronistic thinking.

Nevertheless, on this view, any who may (or may not) use the Occasional Offices of the church, simply by dint of living in England, have membership in the CE. So, for example, the only Anglican church in the Norfolk sea-side town of Sherringham, has these words on its notice board: “St Peter’s Church exists for the benefit of the whole community, not simply for those people who come to church on a Sunday! We are always delighted to arrange baptisms and weddings.....”<sup>165</sup> Such a concept is the mainstay of the parochial system. When a new incumbent is inducted into his/her ‘living’ s/he is given, by the Bishop, the ‘cure of souls’ of everyone who lives in the parish, not simply those who attend church. In some urban areas that might number many thousands; far too many for any effective ministry, and in practice many parish priests spend most of their time on ‘the converted’. There is, correspondingly, the minimal emphasis placed on the idea of membership:

As a communion the Anglican church believes - even where it is not the established church - that it is a part of the community in which it is set, and not a holy or exclusive huddle...<sup>166</sup>

This model has wide support:

The Church of England.....has all too easily slipped into an associational mode that is comfortable with a first division between church and society. The danger of this is that the church becomes a club.<sup>167</sup>

For Percy, the answer is clear: we need to recognise that “the church does not belong to its members, but performs a duty like any other public building or symphony, and is part of the community”. Another expression of this model is by Wesley Carr, Dean of

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<sup>164</sup> My italics.

<sup>165</sup> Noted June 2000.

<sup>166</sup> White SR (1996) p. 5.

<sup>167</sup> Percy M in Clatworthy J (ed) (1998) p. 14.

Westminster Abbey.<sup>168</sup> Having made the point that it is “notoriously difficult [to propose any] underlying ecclesiology” for the Church of England, he finds its “distinguishing mark [to be that of] a community of people called out both by God to worship and service and by society for a specific function”. He explains:

The Church of England exists less because of any decision of some who consider themselves to be members than on the will, or even need, of the society that forms its context to use it as a means for religious expression. In its believing the Church of England chiefly acts on behalf of others.....it is also part of the thinking of a church that forms itself by negotiation at the boundary between people’s beliefs and feelings, however rarely expressed, and the gospel resource of the Christian community.<sup>169</sup>

This duality of being a part, yet not a part, is a basic problem for ecclesiology.

It is sometimes argued that (particularly working-class) people feel alienated from the church, because socially it is not the ‘done thing’ to attend. The ‘church for the nation’ model is implicit in the writings of Bishop Laurie Green, even though the people he describes find the church an irrelevance:

.....the church seems to present them with a fruitless hierarchy of values which, whilst being called ‘moral’ do not convince them as worthwhile.....Second...to pin God down to systems of abstract doctrine seems quite contrary to inner-city experiences of an indefinable, ineffable God, a God you can challenge but not deny.....The third assumption of inner-city people about Christian faith which conflicts with conventional church teaching is that it is not necessary to find ultimate meanings.....[the fourth conflicting assumption] is that working-class language emphasises belonging [and they] see God especially in public observance, groups, families and the nation....[fifthly]....they see church people saying goodbye to the fun of today in order to participate in a life hereafter which doesn’t sound much fun.<sup>170</sup>

So the church represents values that are foreign to people’s lives (such as chastity before marriage and fidelity within it). Of course, there may be reasons for even committed Christians to disagree with particular moral issues (the way many Catholics seem to ignore

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<sup>168</sup> ‘The Church of England in the Next Millennium: Structure and Organisation’, in Hannaford (1998) pp. 3 – 36.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3, 9 -10.

<sup>170</sup> Green L ‘Blowing bubbles: Poplar’ in Sedgwick P (ed) (1995) pp. 82-84.



their church's teaching on birth control); nevertheless, the wholesale rejection of Christian values as comprising a "fruitless hierarchy", or a refusal to accept the church's teaching about God because it is too "abstract", or a lack of interest in issues of ultimacy, inevitably raises the question: in what sense are people who shun so many basic teachings of the church, a part of that church?

Green goes on to describe what he sees as elements of folk religion which, in his view, are marks of genuine faith: believing that the church is there for you as a right, not as charity; the notion that church attendance can be validly representative ('say one for me, [Vicar]')<sup>171</sup>, and so on. He contends that, when he was a parish priest in the East End of London, locals showed how much they valued their derelict church building by removing windows and other fabric for their own domestic use. This may be just another aspect of that age old potentiality noted by David Hempton: "local chapels came to mean more to the villagers when threatened with amalgamation or extinction than they did as going concerns."<sup>172</sup> For Green, church attendance is inextricably tied up with certain social mores:

A lack of overt religious activity among the white indigenous folk does not mean that they have no faith, but that in comparison with other faiths, Western-style Christianity has not offered them an easily-expressible outward sign of belonging. There is no special costume to wear, no special prayer to make, no distinctive food to eat.<sup>173</sup>

It may well be that the church carries an enormous responsibility for its failure to evangelise significant proportions of the English population, but one has to wonder whether such activity should be carried out if the price is 'easy expression', presumably a faith that makes no demands, and that fits whatever people want of it? Green lived for much of his life in the inner city, and has great experience of it both in his personal

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

<sup>172</sup> In Thomas (ed) (1988) p. 199.

<sup>173</sup> *Op cit.* p. 75.



upbringing and in his ministry, but he seems to have fallen into a kind of political sentimentalism, in which the inner city glows with honour and integrity - and faith:

In the inner city there is a great warehouse full of spirituality which is often referred to as 'implicit' or 'folk' religion which is yearning for expression and which the church is expected somehow to articulate.....*But church-going and Christianity are not synonymous....*those who do not attend but still like to be termed 'C of E' to affirm that they 'belong', would rarely wish to assent to any of the doctrinal beliefs of the Church of England...[which are] an intellectual luxury that few can afford....<sup>174</sup>

However valid (or not) his contention about life in the inner city, is this an acceptable ecclesiology? 'Say one for me, Vicar' may reflect a truly vicarious understanding of the nature of church membership, similar to that in the medieval church. But in those days the church was universal.

In *Members Only?* subtitled 'Is the church becoming too exclusive?',<sup>175</sup> a former BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent asks: "Are the established churches in Britain fast shedding their role as churches for all, and merely becoming denominations?"<sup>176</sup> The problem as he sees it is that the church is becoming "too Christian". Establishment provides a "broad base" to enable the church to make contact with the maximum number of people: "everyone, whatever their interest or lack of interest in religion, has a parish church to which he or she can go, and everyone is included geographically within a congregation".<sup>177</sup>

What Harrison describes seems to be balanced, sociologically, between (as he claims) a denomination (which is happy to grow) and a sect (which makes exclusive demands about membership). However, in practice, the established churches are becoming true denominations where, although there are no great demands placed on membership, there

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 78, 81, 85-86, my italics.

<sup>175</sup> Harrison T (1994).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

are certain broad expectations about what people who wish to enter into membership will believe and do. The illogicality of Harrison's position is illustrated by the fact that although (as Davie and Habgood) he describes certain groups as 'unchurched', he still sees them as somehow being in membership. But if people do not want to "sign up" as adherents of the Christian Faith, why is there this apparent determination that they should, nevertheless, be somehow regarded as members of it? Similarly, if they do not want to "belong to a worshipping fellowship" (a reasonable synonym for the 'ecclesia'), then why seek to impose some kind of involuntary membership upon them?

He describes churches as "exclusive worshipping groups" where "other people – especially those of a general inquiring nature, with unspecific and unfocused spiritual needs, with a feel for eternity but no love of instant answers - do not find a place..."<sup>178</sup> But to deride a group for engaging in its central activity, on the basis that it puts other people off, is akin to castigating the Conservative Party for believing in and working for free enterprise. What Harrison appears to describe is a reluctance (for whatever reason) to make a serious commitment to the religious life. Indeed, *a la carte* religion lies at the heart of Harrison's book, and it seems particularly odd to seek to argue that the church should avoid exercising its basic functions simply because so to do may alienate those who are not particularly interested in it.

Essentially the church is, for Harrison, an organisation which, although it makes certain very clear claims and holds certain fundamental beliefs, should not bind its membership to any such claims or beliefs. What is important is that people should "feel comfortable" within it; indeed, that they be allowed to establish their own terms for membership of it. Anything, apparently, goes. Despite what Harrison regards as the "tendency towards exclusivity" potentially damaging "the spiritual life of the nation" and so leading to "the

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.



complete breakdown of the parish structure,”<sup>179</sup> it is not easy to see how such an organisation could survive in any case; or, indeed, would want to, or need to. What, actually, would be its purpose? If it were a political organisation, then it would require a certain minimum sharing of political beliefs, unless it was to become merely a social club. What if members, making their “own terms”, actually had ideals that were contrary or even inimical to the basic tenets of the organisation?

church going and Christianity may not be synonymous, but they are inextricable, and if membership of the church does not involve the holding of certain beliefs, what is it? Finally, how reasonable is it to provide a religious identity to those who would claim, either positively (in affirming their atheism) or negatively (in terms of their practice), to have no religion at all?<sup>180</sup> Is this simply the result of having a broadly secular society in which people have chosen not to take the ‘religious option’? Such a scenario might suggest that those who would evangelise just need to work harder to bring more into the fold of the church. Henderson argues not:

At the root of the condition is the fact that many people openly and honestly know nothing or only very little about the members and beliefs of the Christian churches. Further, apart from the fact that Christians have large and inaccessible church buildings on just about every street corner, and something of a hand in some religious functions, perhaps funerals, they are a complete mystery at best or an anachronism at worst...It is not that the Christian message is irrelevant - it is unknown. Clarion calls to revivalism, whereby the masses will return to the faith, will fall on deaf ears - there is nothing left to revive. Looked at from the other side, it is Christianity which is outside the fold.<sup>181</sup>

Perhaps “Christianity...is outside the fold” because it, and not society, has failed to adapt properly to the demands of the Gospel in the modern world. This might be the inevitable outcome of the ‘church of the nation’ model.

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>180</sup> 34% of a sample in Britain in the late 1980s made this claim; apparently only the Netherlands has a higher proportion, Wolffe in Parsons (ed) (1993) p. 307.

<sup>181</sup> In Clatworthy J (ed) (1998) p. 29.



But do the statistics support that model?

For the first time since the Church of England was founded less than half the nation is officially Anglican, a demographic study has found. Addressing the conference of the British Society for Population Studies, David Voas, of the University of Sheffield, said most people used to be connected to the C of E through christening. Among those over 50, this level of affiliation is about 70%. But since 1970 less than half of the children born have been christened; in recent years it has been about 30%. In 2001, Anglicans, *even nominal ones*, form less than 50% of the population. By the end of the century, if current trends continue, the church will have less than half the number of nominal adherents it has today...<sup>182</sup>

The point was made even more graphically (and ecumenically) by Callum Brown:

In unprecedented numbers, the British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church, have allowed their church membership to lapse, have stopped marrying in church and have neglected to baptise their children. Meanwhile, their children, the two generations who grew to maturity in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, stopped going to Sunday school, stopped entering confirmation or communicant classes, and rarely, if ever, stepped inside a church to worship in their entire lives. The cycle of inter-generational renewal of Christian affiliation, a cycle which for centuries tied the people however closely or loosely to the churches and to Christian moral benchmarks, was permanently disrupted...<sup>183</sup>

Yet, 'church for the nation' is not only the traditional model; it would appear to be the official model of the Church of England, and the basis for its claimed mission not only to provide education for the nation's children, but also to offer baptism to any who want it, whatever their reason for doing so. Has the time come for the Church of England to take rather more seriously the implications of being a part of the Body of Christ?

### **'Gathered Church'**

Here membership is defined, not in terms of belonging if a person does not actively opt out, but by the deliberate act of opting in through some kind of deliberate decision and personal commitment:

If the church is shaped by the gift and call of God then it is less an institution existing to provide religious ceremonies for the nation than a community which has to be

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<sup>182</sup> *Church Times* 'News', 14/9/01, p. 5, my italics.

<sup>183</sup> Brown CG (2001) p. 1.

joined. No one has the right, by virtue of being English, to be a member of it. No one is born into the church. The only way into the church.....[is] to receive the gift of God given in baptism and to make a free personal response to that gift....If there is no Christianity without the gift of God equally there can be no discipleship without decision and commitment....ultimately no one can say 'Yes' to God for me. Just because there is so much that is good about the tolerance and openness of the church of England, *it is important that we do not distort it into a sentimental indulgence.*<sup>184</sup>

Cornwell scorns the view that you can call yourself a member of the CE but neither "share its beliefs nor....practise its morals nor....take part in its prayer and worship", and, he concludes: "What God offers is not just a place in a club which welcomes non-playing as well as playing members, *but the awful seriousness of becoming a member of the body of his Son Jesus Christ.*"<sup>185</sup> The implications of this view are clear: if the Church of England focuses wholly or mainly on its membership (whilst being "kept open to all the human searching for God"), it is certainly no more than any other denomination.

H R McAdoo reported<sup>186</sup> a 1981 survey which claimed that "57.9 per cent of Anglican clergy and laity in the dioceses of the United States of America are so by decision and adoption." What of the rest? That they are there at all is presumably precisely because of a lack of demand for any kind of commitment:

[The Church of England provides] a religion demanding minimum commitment, and requiring neither deviation from the generally accepted ethical and social standards of the wider society nor burdensome donations of time, money or energy.<sup>187</sup>

However, at the root of 'ekklesia' is the notion of being 'called out'; presumably for a purpose, and requiring some kind of commitment, and to use such pejorative phrases as 'holy huddle'<sup>188</sup> of such a group is to miss the point. White offers an ecclesiological 'Aunt Sally' by suggesting that one option for the church is to "cut itself off from the world"

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<sup>184</sup> Cornwell P (1983) p.39, my italics.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41, my italics.

<sup>186</sup> 'Authority in the Church: Spiritual Freedom and the Corporate Nature of Faith' in Sykes (ed.) (1987) pp. 69ff.

<sup>187</sup> Gilbert AD (1980) p. 112.

<sup>188</sup> White SR (1996) pp 5, 6.



completely. However, he also claims that the church “is, presumably, there to serve [the world].”<sup>189</sup> A moment’s thought will demonstrate that these aims are not in opposition. There is no ‘either withdraw or serve’ dichotomy. Rather, the real issue is about membership. There is nothing illogical in the notion of the church serving its non-members – that is famously how Temple saw its role. It seems self-evident that the church could never be true to its vocation if it turned its back on the world, because in so doing it would forfeit “its claim to faithfulness to the pattern of Christ’s ministry and to the mind of Christ himself”.<sup>190</sup> It is an entirely different matter to suggest that in order to do this, the non-members must be regarded as members. To require some conditions for membership is hardly to shut oneself off from the world. To those who would then say “God’s love is not conditional”, one might respond by saying that although Jesus is an icon of the compassion of God, even he said ‘Follow me’, expecting a response: ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Those who said ‘no’ were not his disciples. The point has been made by Edward Norman:

....one of the most certain things about religion is that those most in need of it are the least likely to realise the fact. The Gospels are full of hints that those who take up the Cross will be a small number.<sup>191</sup>

At a conference for CE schools organised by Manchester Diocese,<sup>192</sup> the speaker David Moore (HMI and Anglican Priest) challenged his audience to think of any occasion when Jesus ever rejected anyone (arguing that church schools should never reject anyone – a fairly simplistic view when a school is oversubscribed). He had obviously forgotten that the rich young man<sup>193</sup> was not told: ‘That’s all right, keep your money and come and join me in any case’.

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>191</sup> Norman E (1989) ‘Is there a case for a National Church?’ *Churchman* Vol. 103 No. 4, p. 306.

<sup>192</sup> 8/2/02.

<sup>193</sup> *Luke* 18: 23 – 24.



Of course, while the church seeks to be holy, it is full of people who fail to achieve this ideal. So the notion of a 'holy huddle' is thus even more unhelpful, suggesting the worst kind of exclusivism. Yet there is a sense in which the church must be, by its very nature, exclusive. If everyone is, by definition, a member of a group, then that group is no more nor less than the human race. Any grouping within this must be exclusive to a certain extent, and rightly so, for there are many: Hindus, Jews, Humanists etc. who would be offended to be thought of as 'really' being Christian (Rahner's concept of the 'anonymous Christian'). It is another matter altogether when a group sets itself up to exclude as many others as possible; that is where the denomination becomes a sect. But it is important for group identity to have some aspects which set members apart from non-members (such as being able to receive Communion). For a religious group this is bound to include some kind of shared beliefs and attitudes, and for the sake of the group, some element of shared commitment.

So is the Church of England, even against ecclesiological criteria, a church or a denomination type? It would be too simplistic to make a direct identification of the former with the 'church of the nation' model (although it comes close to it), and the latter with the 'gathered church' model, which might be interpreted as dangerously close to being sect-like. We have already seen that the two models represent opposite positions, and the truth is probably to be found somewhere between these two extremes, although closer to the latter than the former. Wesley Carr argues that three major changes in the role and function of the CE occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Before the First World War the Church of England was

....a national church, its activities at every level permeating and being permeated by English society. People attended; the clergy were influential; and the church was strong in areas such as education, health and welfare.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> In Hannaford (1998), p. 3.

Whether or not one agrees with this upbeat assessment (particularly bearing in mind the 1851 census), this is the church/ecclesia model. Due to the trauma of world war and the disintegration of many traditional values, there was what Carr describes as a “preoccupation with becoming a lively *denomination*”. This was marked, in his view, by increasing lay participation, the church speaking “to” rather than “for national life”, and the development of liturgies that were “more self-consciously Christian”.<sup>195</sup> The third stage (since the 1980s) is marked by pluralism and relativism, with its emphasis on “self expression” in the context of “non-institutional and private religion”. While Carr does not actually use the word ‘sect’, this would appear to be the model he is describing, and he goes on to describe the possibility of the church becoming a closed system. But it is not simply about being open or closed. There is a continuum along which the various sociological terms might be applied. The CE may become less open, and yet be nothing like a sect, not least because it would still want to encourage people into membership.

For Carr, despite these changes, “the task of the Church of England has remained the same. It continues to exist....on the basis of the interchange between it and its context.”<sup>196</sup> This is what is distinctive about its ecclesiology. It is neither more nor less than Establishment. Carr predicts a future where there will be a continuing decline in religious practice but where there will still be a religious need for the Church of England. That need will be for “some institution to handle on [society’s] behalf the irrational and confusing dimensions of human life [and] to provide opportunities for religious behaviour”.<sup>197</sup> It is, he agrees, a “curious” institution, but it does exist, in a “technically” irrational way “to serve in various fashions those who are neither members nor may have any intention of joining.”<sup>198</sup> That is unproblematic: the church’s vocation is to serve. But whether such a “curious” institution could continue to assume that those it serves are somehow also in membership, without

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4, my italics.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.



taking virtually all meaning from the notion of being a Christian, is another matter. That is where White is exactly right in his contention that “it is very difficult to maintain a balance between standing apart and standing aloof.”<sup>199</sup> Here we are driven inexorably towards the need to provide a clearer definition of the church’s mission, and this discussion, potentially very wide, will focus particularly on the role of church schools.

## Mission

In 1998 a General Synod Resolution affirmed CE schools as standing “at the centre of the church’s mission to the nation”, and it is particularly important to consider what this might mean. Mission (and ministry, rightly seen together) are joint functions of the church as it seeks to share in the reconciling activity of God.<sup>200</sup> But

...while the church is continuous with the wider community of faith that extends indefinitely both in time and space, the church itself [is] the *consciously Christian* church, the community of those holding the Christian faith....<sup>201</sup>

Presumably, once God’s work is completed, there will be no need for the church! But while it is in existence it has a reasonably clear identity defined by generally agreed criteria: baptism, scripture, historic creeds etc., and is a concrete historical phenomenon with a conscious purpose.

The root idea of mission<sup>202</sup> is ‘sending’ (Lat ‘*mittere*’). So the membership of the church – the Body of Christ, a fellowship – is not only ‘called out’ from the world, it is also in the process of being ‘sent out’ into the world. The mission will be achieved in part through its interaction with the world (those outside the church), and in part through its internal ministry. If we restrict ‘mission’ to its outgoing aspect, then that would appear to fall into

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<sup>199</sup> White (1997) p. 7.

<sup>200</sup> 2 *Corinthians* 5: 19.

<sup>201</sup> Macquarrie (1977) p. 388, my italics.

<sup>202</sup> I am indebted to a paper written by Prof. Jeff Astley (with contributions by me and David Lankshear) for the Church Schools Review Group in October 2000; the source was that available to the Review Group, on which they based their conclusions.



two clear foci: mission through service, and mission through evangelisation (in its broadest sense).

If both ministry and mission are aspects of the continuation of Christ's own ministry of reconciliation, then they are shared by every Christian. Although that ministry of reconciliation is "the ministry of responding to those in need,"<sup>203</sup>

[W]e delude ourselves if we think that some ideal state of affairs is attainable on earth, or that the main business of Christianity is to establish a super welfare state.....Christianity is not a mere worldliness, but a holy worldliness; as we learned from the temptations of Jesus, Christianity is grievously reduced if it is turned into a mere social gospel.....Sanctification may be a slow process, but its end is always ahead....Sanctification belongs to the community, as the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit, and within that community there must be room for 'weaker brethren' who are sustained by the whole body.<sup>204</sup>

Mission is more than social service, although it may well be reflected in acts of basic human caring. It is, for example, to work for justice in an unjust world, and for reconciliation in a broken and divided world (as well as within a broken and divided church). But is it a primary mission of the church to provide education where adequate provision is made by the State? It may be argued that involvement in the education sector provides an opportunity to engage in service, although it may be that such service could be even more effectively provided through other means. Clearly involvement in education is not a necessary function of a serving church (although a nurturative role may be a reasonable activity of a denomination). Similarly, it may be doubted whether it is a service to offer membership of the church through baptism. This is to put the ecclesiological cart before the horse. The purpose of membership of the church is to engage in mission, not to be in receipt of it. If it be argued that the church needs more members in order to engage in effective mission, then that cannot be denied; whether that can be achieved through social

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<sup>203</sup> Macquarrie (1977) p. 423.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 519, 522.

baptism is to be doubted, particularly when the important element of encouraging ‘sanctification’ is often so blatantly ignored, because of a ‘no strings attached’ policy.

The fact that the church has spread from a provincial backwater of the Roman Empire to the whole world is itself sufficient evidence of mission through evangelism. In the past, missionaries were those who went to preach the Gospel to ‘the heathen’, where they also engaged in acts of care, providing education and medicine. Nevertheless the main motive behind the endeavour was conversion to the Faith. Today, however, it cannot be assumed that all non-Christians are ripe for conversion. In the past Christians had a low view of other religions, seeing them as at least ignorant and misguided, and possibly as a threat as well. Their adherents were considered fair game for missionary work, in this narrower sense. Today, it may be argued that there is a more enlightened view of other Faiths, and one which speaks of dialogue rather than conversion. As Macquarrie points out:

The whole conception of mission has been changing rapidly in the past few decades and in particular there has been a revulsion against the association of Christianity with exclusively Western formulations, and so a new respect on the part of missionaries for indigenous cultures....but [this] must be carried further.<sup>205</sup>

Is there therefore, any longer, any need to try to bring followers of other religions into the Christian Church? Certainly there are Christians who, looking to the ‘uniqueness of Christ’ in an exclusive sense, would argue that there is still a task to be performed: Muslims, Hindus (and perhaps less, Jews) need to be shown the True Faith. However, there are equally those who recognise the activity of God in the lives of people of other Faiths, and who therefore see no need for conversion at all. We are partners in faith, and not rivals, and the church is what Macquarrie terms a “representative community”:

....both representing the kingdom in the midst of the world, and representing the world toward God in its serving, witnessing and praying among and for all men.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 443.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 444.

So

....the aim of the church is not to win the world, but rather to identify itself with the world, even to lose itself in the world, in such a way as to bring nearer the kingdom in which the distinction of church and world will be lost. What is important is the manifesting and propagating of Christ's self-giving love, and the awakening of this in ever wider areas of human society. But this may well happen without these areas becoming incorporated into the Christian Church or explicitly confessing the Christian faith [for]...the Christian Church is continuous with a wider community of faith, and that wherever the love that springs from reverence for Being is active, there God has drawn near and revealed himself....<sup>207</sup>

What of those who have no religion at all? Are they 'fair game' to missionary work, as classically conceived? Whatever the finer points of argument about the nature and means of evangelism, it is clear that as the Christian faith has developed it has been seen as a Faith to be shared. We cannot ignore the fact that in calling people to radical discipleship, Jesus' demands were hard: the dead and families had to be left. What was distinctive in Jesus' message was the focusing of love on enemies, foreigners, the weak, the stigmatised and the outcast. In this way,

....the whole of reality, creation, life and the goal of history, become the expression of the ethical will of God. The God of Jesus - like the God of the Old Testament - is a blazing fire of ethical energy which glows through all things and which either embraces and changes human beings as love or confronts them in the form of 'hell fire' with a life which has gone wrong for ever.<sup>208</sup>

So of course the church, extending the ministry of reconciliation, ought to serve the disadvantaged both within and outside itself. But that is not to say that the church and the World (or Nation) are identical. Without doubt human lives are changed as much outside the church as within it, just as some lives within the church may equally be untouched: history teaches enough about the perversions of religion, and the way that God's image and likeness has been distorted by and within them. But the ethical imperative is still there. Christians are called to serve - and possibly to suffer as well.<sup>209</sup> The work of such as

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* p. 445.

<sup>208</sup> Theissen G & Merz A (1998) p. 395.

<sup>209</sup> *Isaiah* 53:3-5.



Mother Theresa provides us with a clear icon of service targeted simply on the basis of need. But to meet need does not necessarily entail bringing people within the fold of the church (although this may happen) and we should not confuse 'going out' with 'coming in'.

Astley posed the direct question: just how do church schools stand (as the Synod declared) at the centre of the church's mission to the nation?<sup>210</sup> He explicitly recognises the areas of confusion:

Church pronouncements and popular theology have often distinguished a narrower conception of mission focusing on the proclamation of good news.....and the consequent expansion ('planting', 'growth') of the Christian church....On this narrower view, mission is distinguished from the diaconal or service dimension of the church's work.....<sup>211</sup>

It is therefore important to distinguish between implicit and explicit mission. There is a complex relationship between each form of mission, and the worship of the church, which may either be seen as an aim of mission (to bring more people into the worshipping community), or as a celebration of the outcome of mission. Astley considers the implications of each kind of mission the narrower/explicit, and the broader/implicit. For the former,

....the focus is on proclaiming the kingdom of God so that people will respond to it, repent and be saved out of a sinful world.<sup>212</sup>

Although this 'way' poses problems due to factors such as Establishment, secularism and ecumenism, the church cannot escape what would be required – on this definition of mission - of its schools:

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<sup>210</sup> 'What is the church's mission to the nation, and what part do church schools play?' Reprinted in the Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads, April 2001.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

....some overt proclamation and invitation must somehow be presented to and heard by the pupils within the school, and perhaps also their parents and families and the community that the school serves. But that 'community' may itself be understood in two ways: as the church community ('the gathered church'?) or as the non-ecclesial neighbourhood.<sup>213</sup>

The alternative, broader, view allows for a much wider range of 'missionary' activities. Astley cites the notion of the 'humanization' of the world, involving working for social justice and peace. Mission, according to this model, is simply service. It is at this point that Astley appeals to the 'general' function of church schools which is, he claims, underpinned by a theology of service.

Historically, the great period of church school building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was certainly imbued with a strong sense of mission, where the aim was "to proclaim the truth of Christianity in general and of Anglicanism in particular."<sup>214</sup> However, the partnership between church and state entails that explicit missionary fervour to be muted – why should the state pay for the church's missionary activity? To replace it must be a theology of service, a theology of nurture, and a theology of prophecy.

Astley applies the theology of service to church schools serving a local neighbourhood, or which "predominantly recruit pupils from backgrounds in which the Christian faith is not practised." Because "overt evangelism" cannot be reconciled with a liberal education, he concludes that church schools can have no direct missionary function, in this narrow sense. Having ruled out evangelisation, and recognising that general educational provision is made by the State, the question is left unanswered as to precisely what role church schools do have in serving the general population.

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

On the other hand he applies the theology of nurture to schools which serve children from churchgoing families who have specifically chosen to attend them:

Primarily these schools are nurturing a freely-constituted faith community...[and so] evangelisation within the faith community, which many Christian educators see as part of - or as an essential complement to - Christian nurture is arguably a very different activity from mission to those outside the faith community.<sup>215</sup>

Prophecy “sits alongside both service and nurture.” It is one of the functions of (Christian) education “to educate prophets to discern and speak of God’s word, kingdom and will in God’s world.” So, for Astley:

The church school that serves a depressed neighbourhood is implicitly witnessing to the transforming power of Christ. The church school that is nurturing the faithful is implicitly a sign to the active transforming power of Christ in the world. The church school that raises the prophetic voice against bullying and against marginalizing the disadvantaged, and in support of the needs of pupils and the vocation of teachers, is implicitly proclaiming the gospel values of Christ crucified and of the Easter resurrection.<sup>216</sup>

But these are examples of implicit rather than explicit mission. They may lead to an explicit Christian commitment on the part of those who are touched by the activity; they may not. Indeed, “the church that insists that church schools stand at the heart of its mission to the nation, but understands this only in the sense of an explicit mission, runs the risk of alienating the very souls it seeks to save.” However, what Astley calls a “more ecclesiological” view “focuses on the distinctiveness of the church and of church schools, and treats both as the ‘leaven in the lump’ of society.” Church schools, operating as “communities of the Spirit”, will send out people from their communities who will change the world. Here Astley quotes, with approbation, Macquarrie’s notion of “conforming humanity to Christhood.” That, for Astley, is the mission of church schools. But does it work? Astley concludes, in fact, that church schools “do not influence overly the religious

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.



commitment of young people recruited from non-churchgoing backgrounds.”<sup>217</sup> If that is the case, then it would seem to undermine any case for mission through service, not least on the grounds of ineffectiveness. Where, one wonders, does that leave the Church of England as a missionary church, if what Synod declares to be a very significant part of its work is somehow failing? Perhaps the more general answer is that a misguided ecclesiology undermines the church’s mission, because it leads to a misdirection of both intentions and resources. A more specific answer will be found in reviewing the church’s engagement with education.

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

### Chapter 3: The Church of England and the Dual System.

Education in the Middle Ages was a church monopoly. But while, following the Reformation, the Scottish Kirk maintained its tight grip on the education system, in England, “the coherence and comprehensiveness of the Scottish provision was lacking and.....the established church never moulded a national system of education.”<sup>1</sup> In fact education was to become a major point of confrontation between Establishment and Nonconformity. Rival educational societies were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: the British and Foreign School Society (originally the Royal Lancastrian Society) was established by Dissenting congregations (with some more liberal Anglicans) in 1808, while the Church of England founded the ‘National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church’ in 1811. While the former set up schools for the labouring and manufacturing classes, with no restriction as to their religious persuasion (religion being taught according to general Christian principles, but with no creeds or catechisms), the latter (now ‘The National Society’)<sup>2</sup> aimed

....to give to the poor such knowledge and habits as would be sufficient to guide them through their life in their proper stations, and especially ‘to teach them the doctrines of Religion according to the principles of the established church, and to train them to the performance of their religious duties by an early discipline’.<sup>3</sup>

These two societies were to dominate the English educational system during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The National Society, however, enjoyed far greater resources, and as early as the 1830s had founded around 3,500 schools. In 1833 the first state funding for education was a grant of £20,000, to be shared by the two societies. In 1839 the Government took steps to exercise greater control over the provision of education through a Committee of the Privy Council which was to be responsible for the distribution of future grants, developing a

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<sup>1</sup> Cruickshank M (1963) p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> From 1972 the National Society and the CE Board of Education committed themselves to work together, and increasingly staff appointments were made jointly, carrying dual responsibilities. So the General Secretary of the Board was also the General Secretary of the NS.

<sup>3</sup> Hammond PC (1977) p. 155.

system of school inspections, and providing some teacher training. Neither the Church of England nor the Free Churches welcomed State involvement in education, although they were happy to accept grants. Initial plans for a state 'Normal school' to train teachers were dropped and inspection arrangements modified, giving the Archbishops certain rights in nominating Inspectors. But two important principles had been established: the right of the State to be involved in the provision of education, and its right to inspect it. The partnership between church and state had begun.

However, the continuance of denominational bickering convinced many that the 'radical' solution – state provision of secular education – was the only way forward. For their part, the churches were equally convinced that no education was possible without religious education:

Children must...learn to read the Bible. The ability to write was less important than the ability to read, and some even held that it might be dangerous to teach writing since he who could write might write criticisms of the faith and of the established political order.<sup>4</sup>

State 'interference' developed apace from mid-century with proposals to contribute towards teachers' salaries, and (so) regulate teaching qualifications. Attempts were made in 1847 to increase lay control in the 'management' (i.e. governance) of all schools which had been built with the assistance of Government grant. There were also plans to allow parents to opt out of religious teaching. The National Society was forced to accept the former, and some Anglican leaders resigned from the NS.

Financially, State involvement in education had increased considerably. In 1847 the State contributed £100,000; in 1857, £500,000, and now not simply for buildings, but for salaries and equipment as well. It was becoming clear that the churches could not provide a state

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<sup>4</sup> Musgrave P (1968) p. 11.



education system. Problems of school supply were exacerbated by two factors: the practice of establishing CE schools on a parish basis, which meant that their spread was uneven, and the fact that the parishes most able to establish schools were those which were prosperous, and so the schools themselves tended to be, in the main, in the most prosperous areas. This was the case even with Dissenters' schools, which tended to be founded in areas inhabited by the commercial classes. The notion of church schools being founded to serve the poor is more romantic than historical. There were many thousands of children, mostly the impoverished, who, into the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and despite the establishment of a number of so-called 'Ragged' schools by individual philanthropists), had no access to education. It was clear that pure 'Voluntaryism' had failed:

....neither their resources nor their energies, great though they were, were equal to the task and the dregs of the child population remained largely untouched. The voluntary system was not for the poor, not for the urchins who swarmed in the streets of the great towns and cities, nor for the unfortunates who were early absorbed in the mines and factories. For these, the children of the under-privileged, the State alone could provide.<sup>5</sup>

19th Century church school builders were not simply altruistic and had a very clear purpose. The most important subject on the curriculum was religious instruction, and denominationalism in religious teaching (to be proscribed in Board Schools from 1870) was considered an entirely proper activity. CE Schools tended to be built by the local vicar

....who was advised to site it near the parsonage so that he could call in at any time if he had ten minutes to spare, for a school was the parish priest's right hand, *to be treated as the vestibule of the church. The children most certainly were made to go to church on Sundays* or otherwise they would be found bird's-nesting or getting nuts.<sup>6</sup>

Problems arose in those areas where the CE School was the only one available, and nonconformists objected to their children having to learn the Anglican catechism. The problem was such, particularly in rural areas, that the Privy Council Committee insisted that money would only be provided for those schools which allowed a conscience clause.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Hammond (1977) p. 154, my italics.

Those CE schools which relaxed their tighter denominational safeguards did so because it was the only way they could be assured of continuation of funding.

Cruickshank offers an interesting insight from the Newcastle Commissioners: parents' "selection of a school, in so far as it is affected by the character of instruction, seems rather to be determined more by the efficiency with which things tend to the advancement in life of the children who are taught in it and by its general tone and discipline." Inspectors, therefore, often found "children of church parents attending British Schools [i.e. founded by the BFSS] and children of nonconformist parents attending church schools."<sup>7</sup> It is not just today that parents choose schools on the basis of their success.

From the 1860s, developments in the suffrage meant increasing the political influence of Dissenters, and there was a growing recognition by the Church of England that the traditional identity of church and state was changing. In 1870 Forster's Education Act provided the basis for future development. It was to be up to local school boards, directly elected by ratepayers, to decide the pattern of provision in their own areas, with financial support from local rates for non-denominational 'board' schools. Parents were to have the right to withdraw their children from religious instruction, the inspection of which would be ended. Government grants were to continue to depend on satisfactory delivery of education, with 50% central grant available to denominational schools (to balance their lack of local financial support), although these specifically excluded grants for building new schools. The Dual System was established, but few were entirely happy:

The half-hearted assertion of State power disappointed the hopes of those who wanted a national system of public elementary schools under local control; the creation of rate aided local agencies roused the fears of those who stood for the denominational principle in education.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cruickshank (1963) p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33



There were, therefore, to be two different kinds of school, different not only in terms of the kind of religious teaching, but also in terms of the way they were to be governed. Furthermore, rivalry, rather than partnership, was to be the byword.

Only in the late 1840s had the Roman Catholic Church joined the race to build schools, and “wherever Roman Catholic schools were established they catered for a more depressed section of the populace than did the British [i.e. Dissenting], the Wesleyan, or even the National [CE] schools.”<sup>9</sup> Roman Catholics, however, were clear that their schools were for RC children, taught by RC teachers. As Cruickshank remarks:

It was a minority religious group insisting that its children should be educated in a fully *denominational* atmosphere. Above all Roman Catholics stressed the rights of parents to have children educated in schools of their choice.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that the term ‘denominational’ has many different nuances. The Roman Catholic Church then, as now, would never consider itself a denomination in any narrow sense of that word: it is ‘the church’. That was very much the position of the Church of England during these 19<sup>th</sup> century debates, and it continues to be the position for many Anglicans today. The ‘denominations’ were the others: the Dissenters or Nonconformists. The argument here is that, whatever and whomever else meets this description, the Church of England at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is as much a denomination, in sociological terms, as any other church – including the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Catholic Church in England. It is interesting that the term ‘denominational’ was used of church-focused school provision in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and continues to be used today. Church schools are often called denominational schools, although the term ‘faith school’ is currently more in vogue.

Of course, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Church of England was not nominally a minority group struggling to maintain its identity, yet the express purpose of CE schools was to educate

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36, my italics.



“according to the principles of the Established Church”, and the teaching of doctrine and liturgy was considered essential. However, 150 plus years on, the Church of England is in much the same *de facto* position as was the Roman Catholic Church then. To seek in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to understand CE schools in the same way as they were understood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as the Dearing Report seems to do) is to miss the point entirely. The RC model is now more appropriate: the opportunity for parents to choose an alternative, and for children to be educated in a “fully denominational atmosphere” (which is what the Dearing Report seems to be calling for, without taking those arguments to their logical conclusion).

Much has been made in recent years of the Church of England’s ‘grand tradition’ of founding schools. The ‘general/service’ model for church schools implies, and its proponents often argue explicitly, that the main reason why the church established schools in the 19th Century was to serve the poor, and that therefore ought to be the model today. Research into the establishment of my own school, Canon Slade School in Bolton, a mid-19th Century foundation, shows a different picture.<sup>11</sup> Those intent on founding a church school in a town at the heart of the Industrial Revolution were initially seeking to imitate the Manchester Athenaeum with its “classes, lectures, soirees and conversaziones, musical entertainments and other attractions”, all geared towards “elevating moral and social character”.<sup>12</sup> That particular project was eventually abandoned in favour of building a school which would

....provide a Classical and Commercial Education, combined with religious and moral instruction in conformity with the Church of England, as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, together with the articles and authorised formularies.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, this school aimed to “extend the quantity and quality of Anglican provision for the education of the ‘middle and labouring classes’.”<sup>14</sup> It was felt that the poor were

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell L *unpublished paper for the Governors of Canon Slade School*, December 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Poole R ‘Popular Leisure and the Music Hall’, in Mitchell *art cit.* p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from the Bolton Chronicle, 25/1/1851, in Mitchell, *art cit.* p. 3.

adequately provided for by the 'National' elementary schools, six of which existed in Bolton. Therefore,

[I]nevitably, at a time when access to secondary education was not yet freely available to all, the school's target audience was overwhelmingly middle class....The only services which were provided...aimed specifically at a working-class audience were the evening Classes.....<sup>15</sup>

Of course, Victorian founders were providing schools for families which, otherwise, would have had no immediate access to schooling. Today every community has access to education; and it is free. Even in the Victorian CE schools graduated charges were levied. They also operated in a society which was more overtly Christian than today: most people identified with the rites and ceremonies of the church. Whether or not such activities were motivated by spiritual or other needs is a moot point: "popular religion [can be] crass, bigoted, sectarian and disruptive of human relationships".<sup>16</sup> But presumably certain assumptions could be made about the general adherence to the church of those who used the school: it was normally their denomination, providing their school. Society has changed; whatever Victorian intentions were, they can no longer be directly relevant, simply because the socio-religious context is so different.

Following the 1870 Act school provision developed apace with its dual structure and its consequent rivalries.

Naturally, denominationalists were anxious to safeguard their own schools, built and maintained through the years at great sacrifice, but some of them were out for much more and wanted to confine the activities of the school boards to the poorest children, the ragamuffins and arabs of the street, while they themselves catered for children of the deserving poor.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>16</sup> Hempton D in Thomas (ed) (1988) p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> Cruickshank (1963) p. 41.



This distinction between the ragamuffins and the deserving poor does tend to modify a picture of the church seeking to serve the poorest of the poor. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that many in the church did all they could to hinder the development of board schools, because they feared the competition. Of course, this was not a one-way process, and there was much argument during the 1870s as to whether school boards should pay for children to attend denominational schools.

By the 1880s two million children were attending 14,000 denominational schools, against 750,000 children attending 4000 board schools. However, the churches were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their schools, and many had to be handed over to the school boards despite the efforts of the National Society. Not all members of the Church of England were convinced that church schools were worth the cost. In 1875 the BFSS reported that the Bishop of Manchester was preparing to pass all the church schools in his diocese to the school boards. This contrasted with the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church which, by 1880, had virtually doubled the number of its schools to over 750, and that with very few government grants. Neither were the school boards sluggish: by 1885 the proportion of children attending non-denominational schools had increased from a quarter to a third. The situation for voluntary/denominational schools was not improved by disunity and lack of a coherent policy, and as a result little was done by governments to ameliorate their difficult financial position.

All was to change with the 1902 Education Act. School boards were abolished and education became the responsibility of local government. Voluntary schools were termed 'non-provided' schools, in contrast to those 'provided' by local authorities, but these 'non-provided' schools were in fact placed on a much stronger footing financially with local authorities 'providing' for teachers' salaries and equipment. The denomination was still responsible for the provision and repair of buildings. Most important, the future of church



schools as a significant part of the educational landscape seemed to be assured. However, following a Liberal victory in the General Election of 1906, church schools faced a distinct threat from a Government which had as one of its platforms, strong objections to 'Rome on the rates'. Although specifically against support for Roman Catholic schools, it was possible that the political fall-out could have disadvantaged CE schools as well. The Methodist Church had largely withdrawn from supporting the provision of its own schools, and was not minded to pay for others. However, a Bill to withdraw financial support from church schools, and in effect, to dismantle the dual system, failed in the Lords in 1906. An amended Bill which actually met many Anglican objections came to a similar fate, even though, in Cruickshank's view:

Had it succeeded the Birrell [President of the Board of Education] Bill would have anticipated the religious settlement of the 1944 Act.....It is impossible not to regret the failure of Birrell's Bill. In the long controversy between church and state here was the opportunity for an enduring settlement. But the occasion passed and with it the chance of establishing a system of education which would have been unified and efficient.<sup>18</sup>

A further Bill, destructive of denominational (and local authority) interests, failed in 1908, and with it withered much of the religious wrangling.

In the inter-war years, church schools did not flourish. Lack of church financial support meant that some school buildings were in a parlous state, as well as offering an indifferent quality of education compared with the newer local authority schools. Over the years the proportion of children being educated in church schools had decreased from around 40% to just over 20%. Between 1900 and 1939 the number of RC schools rose from 1,000 to 1,200, while the number of CE schools fell from 12,000 to 9,000. The 1936 Education Act made a hole in the 1902 compromise by adjusting the liabilities of voluntary schools, and permitting grants for the building of new denominational schools. It brought about

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 102 – 103.

remarkable agreement between the various parties, and led to proposals to build 289 RC and 230 CE senior schools, most of which were still-born in 1939. However,

[S]ince the last great settlement, in 1902, the whole conception of education had changed. Then it had been merely a question of elementary instruction; now, there was to be secondary education for all [following the Spens Report of 1938], and the churches must either provide the additional and vastly superior accommodation or confine themselves to the field of primary education.<sup>19</sup>

Many have seen the salvation of church schools as the result of the commitment and support of William Temple, specifically the influence he had on the 1944 Education Act. For Temple, it was certainly not enough for the state to be the sole provider of education:

Our main business is not surely to be fighting a rearguard action in perpetual retreat until we are driven off the field by the competition of the resources of the state, but to take care that we are interpenetrating with our influence all that the State itself is doing.<sup>20</sup>

And elsewhere:

Education is only adequate and worthy when it itself is religious.<sup>21</sup>

The 1944 Act introduced a daily act of worship and compulsory Religious Education for all pupils in state schools, as well as formalising the category of Voluntary status. Schools which could no longer rely on financial backing of the church could still retain their church connections via voluntary controlled status, while voluntary aided schools benefited by considerable financial support from the state, with certain 'protections' depending on the church continuing to provide a percentage financial contribution.

From 1944 - 1998 there were three types of voluntary school: voluntary controlled, voluntary aided school and special agreement.<sup>22</sup> In general the Controlled School has a

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> Address to Canterbury Diocesan Conference, July 1942.

<sup>21</sup> Address to the National Society.

<sup>22</sup> Some voluntary schools became Grant Maintained after 1988; this status was discontinued from 1999.



limited connection with the church. Their providers were not able, either at the time of the 1944 Act, or later, to meet their share of the cost of bringing the premises up to the required standard and/or of the continuing external repair. The constitution of the Governing Body is the same as for a Community School, except that provision is made for the continuing representation of the voluntary body that established the school. Generally, school buildings are owned by the voluntary body, but the LEA, which also employs the staff, meets all costs. There are certain special provisions for RE and School Worship. The LEA controls admissions. In terms of Christian ethos there is wide variation, from those schools which virtually ignore their CE status, to those which are almost indistinguishable from VA schools.

In Aided Schools the establishing body, the Foundation, has a majority on the Governing Body, which is the legal employer of staff, has ownership of land and buildings, and control over admissions. The Governing Body is also responsible for the provision of buildings and their external maintenance. They now meet 10% (originally 50%, and for many years 15%) of the capital cost of any improvement or enlargement of the buildings. Running costs are provided through the LEA.

Only around 150 Special Agreement Schools (both primary and secondary) were established by the 1944 Education Act.<sup>23</sup> Originally these schools received grants of 75% for capital and maintenance works, compared with only 50% for the VA School. The Education Act 1959 raised the Aided grant to the same 75%, and then both grants were raised to 85% by the Education Act 1975. The powers of Governors of SA Schools were greater than those in Controlled schools, but more limited than those of Governors in Aided schools, in certain respects. The main difference was that the LEA was the employer of staff. 'Special Agreement' status was ended by the 1998 School Standards and

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<sup>23</sup> S. 114 (1)7.



Framework Act, and all SA CE Schools became Voluntary Aided, with their Governing Bodies becoming the employers of staff.

Following the 1998 Act, there are three categories of state school: Community (ex-County), Voluntary (Aided and Controlled as previously, including the bulk of GM schools which had been Voluntary Schools), and Foundation (mainly originally ex-Grant Maintained Schools). So CE state schools are either 'Voluntary Controlled' (approx. 60% in total, though only just over 40% of secondaries), 'Voluntary Aided' or 'Foundation'. There are only seven CE Foundation Secondary Schools (plus 1 Foundation middle deemed secondary), which to all intents and purposes, particularly regarding control over admissions, are governed as VA schools. There is also one CE City Technology College (CTC). John Gay<sup>24</sup> points out that the geographical spread of church secondary schools is very uneven. There are concentrations in London and in the north-west of England, and only six of the 43 CE dioceses have more than ten, while another six have none at all.<sup>25</sup>

It may seem surprising, but until June 2001 (the Dearing Report), neither the Church of England nor the DfES seemed to know precisely how many CE secondary schools there were. Gay and Greenough described the problem they had in preparing their booklet: 'The Geographical Distribution of Church Schools in England'.<sup>26</sup>

The Department for Education confirmed the number of schools but was not able to produce a list of names and addresses as responsibility for this had been sub-contracted out. When the list was obtained from the agency concerned, it was immediately obvious that there was some confusion over denominations.<sup>27</sup>

It was after this that a Statutory Instrument was published which listed all schools officially deemed to have a religious character. This included schools which were not on the 'Gay

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<sup>24</sup> *Art cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Dearing R (2001) p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Gay J & Greenough J (2000).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

list' and did not include others that were; it even placed a secondary school in the primary category, and there were further oddities, including one school described as 'CE/Christian' ('Christian' is apparently a permitted DfES 'denominational' description). Furthermore, warned Gay, "more differences may emerge when the list of 7000 has been fully checked." When the Consultation Report of the Dearing Review Group was published in December 2000, it included in its appendices lists of the number of CE schools by diocese. That too included a 'health warning':

This list has been compiled by the National Society in consultation with dioceses. Any changes should be notified to the Secretary of the Review Group.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the message to Diocesan Directors of Education was clear: 'please check your numbers and let us know if they are different.' When I raised the question directly with John Gay: 'just how many CE secondary schools are there?', the following was the reply:

I would have thought/hoped that the NS/Dearing list should be the current definitive list. Have a word with Colin Hopkins [Secretary to the Review Group] who was working on it – when I last spoke to him in the spring [2001] he was clear that they would crack it.<sup>29</sup>

In January 1997 (according to National Society figures published in 2000)<sup>30</sup> there were thought to be 4,575 Church of England Primary Schools and 198 Church of England Secondary Schools (204 according to Dearing 2001), providing education for over 900,000 children in the maintained system. This number of secondary schools included 51 'middle-deemed-secondary' schools (58, Dearing 2001) i.e. schools which take children aged 9 to 13, after which they transfer to 'upper' schools. Such schools are a product of the move in a number of LEAs in the 1960s to a three-tier system (first, middle and upper schools), a trend which is now very much in reverse. When this triple system is reorganised into a dual

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<sup>28</sup> Dearing (2000) Appendix 2.

<sup>29</sup> E-mail dated 31/5/01.

<sup>30</sup> Source: *The National Society's Inspection Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition Feb. 2000, p. 7 (apparently based on the same data as Gay & Greenough (2000)).



system (primary and secondary) middle schools normally become primary schools, if they remain open. When the middle-deemed-secondary schools are removed from the list the number of CE secondary schools was judged to be 147. In February 2000, John Gay’s view that

....even this is probably too high. It is likely that 15 old foundation schools may be removed from the C of E lists, and not counterbalanced by new additions. This would bring the total to 135 – 140.<sup>31</sup>

Providing Dearing (2001) is correct the accurate number for all state CE ‘pure’ secondary schools is 146: 101 Voluntary Aided, 37 Voluntary Controlled, 7 Foundation and 1 City Technology College (CTC). As the figures were checked with the Dioceses, one might reasonably have expected them to be the most accurate available. However, in a DfES publication,<sup>32</sup> the number of CE secondary schools as at January 2001 (i.e. between the publication of the Consultation Report and the Final Dearing Report) is given as follows:

VA	118
VC	65
Foundation	8

So according to the DfES the CE has 10 less VA secondaries, and 2 less VC secondaries than it officially claims. It is possible that, at least in part, the discrepancy may have something to do with the fact that the DfES separately identifies 20 VA, 6 VC and 1 Foundation schools as being of “Other Christian faith”, with a note to the effect that this group includes “mixed denominational schools and other Christian beliefs”. *The Education Authorities Directory and Annual*<sup>33</sup> lists annually all state and independent secondary schools in England, Wales and Scotland, but excludes middle-deemed secondary schools. It also conveniently marks schools as VA, VC etc. However, it would not be possible to

<sup>31</sup> Gay ‘Church schools: a geography lesson’, *Church Times Education Supplement*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2000. p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> ‘*Statistics in Education: Schools in England 2001*’, DfES, HM Stationery Office, London, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> School Government Publishing Company.



achieve clarity by the simple mechanical task of counting those listed as VA, because although (on the whole) RC VA schools are identifiable by the 'RC' in their name, CE schools (on the whole) are not always identified; furthermore, there are also VA schools which are non-denominational. It would appear that there is no central source which can provide an exact number of CE secondary schools with any degree of certainty.

The focus of this thesis has been limited to a consideration of Voluntary Aided secondary schools, excluding middle schools and VC schools (and the CTC), but including those SA schools which now (since the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act) are in the VA category, and the total of these whilst the field research was being undertaken was – probably - 101. Because the 8 Foundation Schools were all previously VC schools, they have not been included, although one was visited out of interest (and the reasons for choosing Foundation rather than the VA category noted). By mid-2003, 13 new CE schools had been established,<sup>34</sup> and there is a reorganised VC federation on the Scilly Isles. According to the National Society “there are currently well over twenty more CE secondary schools in the pipeline.”<sup>35</sup> A significant beginning by way of response to Dearing’s challenge to establish 100 new CE secondary schools. But are these new schools being set up for the right reasons?

The Voluntary Aided School has the strongest links with the church. It is significant that the Roman Catholic Church has eschewed Controlled status ('category'), because they did not feel that it presented sufficient opportunities for what they wanted their schools to be and to do. But in what *institutional* sense might VA schools be considered a part of the Church of England? Firstly, they have an official designation as such (as do VC schools), approved by Diocesan Boards of Education and the Archbishops' Council's Board of

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<sup>34</sup> Bradford 2 VA; Hartlepool VA; Sunderland VA; Newcastle VC; Doncaster VA; Nottingham VA; Warrington VA; Blackpool VA; Datchett VA; Mansfield VA; Barnsley joint CE/RC VA; Haringey City Academy; source: Hopkins C 'Aiming at the Dearing target', *Church Times* 13/6/03, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> *The National Society News*, Issue 18, April 2003.

Education,<sup>36</sup> and held at the Department for Education and Skills.<sup>37</sup> The end of the GM system in September 1999 left a lack of clarity relating to the provision of RE and Worship. Officers of the CE Board of Education suggested a formal list of schools that had a religious foundation. The 1998 Act created a formal definition of ‘having a religious character’ with a ‘sieve of tests’<sup>38</sup> created to determine whether a school could claim a particular religious status. Schools which did not have such a character in the past, could not claim one now. The list helped to clarify the position of non-religious voluntary schools. However while the churches were heavily involved in working out the system with the DfES, they were not given the power to veto any particular school’s membership of the list. It was possible for them to ‘disown’ any particular school,<sup>39</sup> but that school would remain with its designation on the DfES’s list, provided it met the criteria. Although, therefore, the list of schools designated as having a religious character does not make a particular church affirm a particular school, the involvement of the churches in the formation of the scheme, does give the list some kind of imprimatur.

The 1998 Act also required that every school had an ethos statement. The DfES published two models for church schools; one provided by Roman Catholic authorities, the other by Church of England officers. These statements will be scrutinised by Section 23 inspectors.<sup>40</sup> Schools could only change the model with good reason. The ethos statement has been regarded by many as supplementing or even replacing Trust Deeds, many of which have been lost.

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<sup>36</sup> Since January 1999; previously the General Synod’s Board of Education.

<sup>37</sup> Formalised in 1998 (Schools Standards and Framework Act).

<sup>38</sup> The term coined by David Lankshear; source: conversation 2/11/99.

<sup>39</sup> As happened to a Welsh RC school ; source David Lankshear.

<sup>40</sup> The term given to the denominational inspection of church schools, which sits alongside the formal OFSTED inspection.



Each Diocesan Board of Education, established by law<sup>41</sup> is part of the synodical government of the Church of England; similarly at a national level, the Archbishops' Council's Board of Education. The existence of both bodies provides clear evidence that the Church of England takes its formal involvement in the provision of education seriously, and that CE schools are recognised as fulfilling the church's educational intentions. DBEs or Diocesan Boards of Finance are also the Custodian Trustees of VA Schools, which also have boards of Administrative Trustees (on which the Diocese has representation). These Trustees are charged with protecting the 'CE nature' of the school. Indeed, the DBE can give a direction to the Governors of any church school if they believe the school is acting against the interests of the Church of England (although this power is qualified). However, this does lock CE schools into the diocesan structures. The only appeal schools governors have against a direction of the DBE is to the Diocesan Synod.

Again, by law, the Governing Body of VA schools has an in-built majority of Foundation Governors to guard the school's foundation as a CE school; these are appointed in various ways, but the church itself will always have the dominant voice in the appointments, both via the Diocese and through more local arrangements. Furthermore, the school's trust deed (if it can be found) also locks the school into the church, because the school is formally an Anglican Educational Trust.<sup>42</sup> Most often this status has little significance, but there are occasions when it can be very important. Certainly, most trust deeds place the church school squarely and explicitly within the mission of the church.

If church schools are part of the church, then it follows that the way they operate will reflect on that church. How they understand themselves and their purpose will have implications for the way that the church understands itself, and vice versa. The purpose of

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<sup>41</sup> DBE Measure, 1991, as amended.

<sup>42</sup> I acknowledge David Lankshear for pointing this out.



the church school is to be defined in terms of the educational task which is its *raison d'être*, and in terms of those children (and their families) who 'receive' what it has to offer.

However, that relationship is reciprocal. The nature of any school community is, to a significant extent fashioned by the pupils who attend it and the families which support it (or, even more significantly, do not support it). It was claimed at a conference on church school admissions<sup>43</sup> that the Church of England places more weight on the staff and governors in determining the Christian nature of the school community than on parents and children. This view may reflect a lack of experience in secondary schools (Lankshear was a primary head). It is argued here that the nature of the secondary school community will be affected (possibly even determined) by the nature of the community it serves, and so by the way in which children are admitted to it. Therefore, the question 'What...?' can be reworded: 'Who are church schools for?' The admissions policy, therefore, is probably<sup>44</sup> the most important factor in any debate about the nature and purpose of church schools. The larger the applicant to entrant ratio, the more influential the admissions policy will be in determining the nature of the school. Most CE Secondary Schools are regularly oversubscribed. How they react to that oversubscription in the formulation of their Admissions Policies will say a great deal about how a school understands its role and purpose as part of the educational arm of the church.

In broad terms there are three main 'models' of church secondary school, and they sit somewhere on a continuum between, or at either end of, two extremes. There is the school which serves the community in which it is situated: the admission criteria relate solely to geographical and sibling factors; this is known as the 'general' or 'service' function. Then there is the school which serves only church members, either Anglican or all (or most)

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<sup>43</sup> Conference at Telford, 14-15 February 2000; the speaker was David Lankshear.

<sup>44</sup> Some might argue that the way schools 'shape' pupils is most significant; this may be because the school has advantages given by the nature of its admissions arrangements; the argument becomes somewhat circular.

Christian denominations. There is the possibility of a further dimension, in the school which seeks to serve ‘people of faith’, and so which also offers places to children of other World Faiths. Here the admission criteria relate to factors to do with faith commitment, most often attendance at the place of worship. The function is designated ‘domestic’ or ‘nurture’, and in this research we identify three versions of it. Finally there is the school which seeks to combine elements of each of the above, providing equal access, or giving more places to one ‘side’ or the other: the admission criteria for these schools will be a combination of geographical and ‘faith’ factors; this is often known as the ‘twin focus’ school.

However, within these relatively neat categories lie individual schools. Church of England schools have all arisen in particular places at particular times, and for particular reasons. Most, if not all, will have been established with Trust Deeds, although many of those Trust Deeds (in an important sense, the *raison d'être* for the school) have either been lost, or have become anachronistic. This has, in effect, meant that schools have often developed according to local circumstance and not as the result of considered theological reflection. Indeed, some schools have been significantly affected by circumstances outside their own control.<sup>45</sup> The classic situation is one where, when undersubscribed, a school has an ‘open’ admissions policy, but when it becomes more popular, the policy becomes markedly more ‘closed’. That kind of development raises the question: ‘Is the way this school has developed compatible with sound theological and ecclesiological principles?’ While the answer may not preclude the existence of a number of different, but valid models, it does not imply that every model is valid.

There has been a variety of ways within the Church of England in which the role of its schools have been understood, contrasting with the clarity of vision within the Roman

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<sup>45</sup> Demonstrated by the history of Archbishop Temple School, Preston.



Catholic Church. Within the Church of England there are still, even after almost 200 years involvement in state education, many issues which require clarification, the most fundamental being: ‘Why are there church schools at all?’ There is evidently, within both the clergy and the laity of the church, still a residuum which would question their very existence.

It has long been the tradition of ‘the church’ to affirm every model of church school, not least the fee paying CE Foundations (which some Christians might consider to be elitist and divisive), even if individual members of the church (or even individual Diocesan Boards) have indicated some difficulty with one type or another. There was a significant exception to this practice in the 1990s. When Grant Maintained Status was introduced by the Tory Government in 1988, a number of Diocesan Boards passed resolutions which indicated that they would not approve, or at least they would be concerned,<sup>46</sup> if any church school became grant maintained. While this is not the place to consider the arguments for or against a school status (which is now defunct), it may be argued that the GM debate within the church, like the debate about church schools themselves, was exemplified by a failure to engage in anything other than the utterance of simplistic theological slogans, compounded by a failure on the part of many church people, sometimes at a senior level, to match their views with their practice.<sup>47</sup>

However, it would appear that the traditional approach has been ended, as CE authorities now seek to define the nature of a CE school far more precisely than before. The Church of England has had no direct power nationally or locally to determine the nature of its schools. However, in 2002, the CE authorities invited the Government to legislate to

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<sup>46</sup> The report of the Blackburn Diocesan Board, *Grant Maintained Status*, Working Party on ‘Choice and Diversity’, 1993, warned against the “fragmentation of the system”; however, the report deliberately refrained from “castigating [either pro-GM or anti-GM groups] for their lack of Christianity”, and officially sat firmly on the fence on the issue (Recommendation 6, p. 17).

<sup>47</sup> As those senior clergy who campaigned against GMS (a system which offered some independence), but who sent their own children to Independent Schools.



amend the DBE Measure in order to compel school governing bodies to consult with the Diocese over their admissions policies, and to 'have regard' to the advice given. That was to be the method by which more centralised policy for 'inclusive' ('twin focus') church schools might be implemented. But does this type of school have a valid rationale?

Traditionally each school's character has been set by its Governing Body, and the Governors' vision has been implemented through their admissions policy. It has been usual for CE primary schools to serve a local community and be linked with particular parish churches. There is greater variation between secondary schools, not least because they serve a larger community. Whatever the intention of their founders there can be little doubt that the trend over the past 20 years has been towards the 'domestic/nurture' model, a trend which the CE nationally is now seeking to halt. But the increased popularity of church schools which has driven the 'domestication' of CE schools has been the result of a number of factors: increasing parental awareness of their right to choose (in fact merely a right to express a preference); the success (with examination performance made public by 'league tables') of church schools; the limited number of church secondary school places available; and the legal requirement for admissions policies to be clear and objective. Because education is never delivered in a values vacuum, it seems only natural that parents will have some concerns about the context in which their children are educated. Finding a school which reflects the values and beliefs of the home would seem to be a justifiable reason to have one's children educated in a Faith school.

As an aspect of the life of the church, it is reasonable to suppose that church schools be considered both 'theologically' i.e. be open to a theological critique, and 'ecclesialogically' i.e. be seen to reflect something of the nature, mission and ministry of the church. In order to have a proper understanding of the role and purpose of CE schools, it is necessary to

build sound theological and ecclesiological foundations. I maintain that the CE has not done so, and seek to fill that gap.

## **Chapter 4: A Critical Review of the most significant Literature pertaining to CE Secondary Schools.**

The literature on church schools as both a national and international phenomenon is extensive, although the range of studies relating to Church of England schools is more limited. This review will focus on the main issue in the ongoing debate about the nature and purpose Church of England Secondary Schools: whether such schools should serve their local geographical community (the ‘general’ or ‘service’ focus), or only Anglican or wider Christian community (the ‘domestic’ or ‘nurture’ focus), or whether it is feasible to combine the two (the so-called ‘twin focus’, a term first used in the Durham Report,<sup>1</sup> and used in various forms by Waddington).<sup>2</sup>

This concept of a ‘twin focus’ conveniently designates two different constituencies. As such it is used imprecisely by certain authors, and it is not altogether clear whether they believe that the ‘twin focus’ should exist within the system as a whole, or within individual schools. The absence of clarity on the matter would suggest that both uses are implied: some schools may exhibit the ‘twin focus’ (although until 2001 there was never any indication that they must do so), and that the system itself, including different models of CE school, inevitably does so. Furthermore, it seems to be assumed that, where such schools accept children of other Faiths, they do so as an aspect of the ‘service’ function; it might, however, be argued that this is more properly a ‘nurture’ function.

Whatever, the debate inevitably returns to the arrangements for admissions as a central and unavoidable question, and raises questions capable both of theological/ecclesiological reflection and empirical investigation. Yet it will be seen that there has been only limited

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<sup>1</sup> *The Fourth R: The Durham Report on Religious Education*, London, National Society/SPCK, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Waddington R (1984).



theological, and virtually no ecclesiological, thinking brought to bear on this basic issue, despite its centrality in elucidating the role, purpose and nature of CE secondary schools.

It is difficult to find anything much of any rigour or value written about Voluntary Aided CE schools during the first 25 years of their formal establishment in 1944. Since then there have been three major documents: the Durham Report of 1970, the Waddington Report of 1984, and the Dearing Report of 2001. However, the nature and purpose of CE VA schools was set out uncompromisingly in an influential booklet<sup>3</sup> published first in 1956 as

....‘the education of children according to the principles of the Church of England’. Their value is enormous both in their material aspect and in their spiritual aspect. The State realises this, and the aided school, as a voluntary school, is considered absolutely necessary to education.<sup>4</sup>

It is a privilege for the church because these schools

....uphold the rights of ‘church’ parents to have their children instructed in the Faith of the Church of England in a Christian atmosphere within the family of the church. [Furthermore] By maintaining an aided school [the governors] uphold and maintain that the nation should be Christian.....

They also provide opportunities for the church as a whole, because they enable “evangelism through education.”<sup>5</sup> These quotations highlight some of the issues which were to dominate the later debate, and it is interesting to compare this mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century view with later thinking. It is doubtful whether in the 1970s and 1980s ‘the State’ felt that church schools were “absolutely necessary to education,” yet in recent years Government Ministers have made some very generous comments about church schools. David Blunkett (DfES Secretary of State 1997 – 2001) has on more than one occasion referred to ‘bottling the church school ethos’. At a Conference sponsored by the previous Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1999 Dr Carey quoted Blunkett as stating

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<sup>3</sup> Tirrell LB (1969).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

that the church was a “major partner with Government for transforming society,”<sup>6</sup> while the then Minister of State, Estelle Morris, claimed that church schools were “a mechanism for bringing out the best in people.”

Explicitly marking its position midway between the 1944 Act and the end of the century, *The Durham Report*<sup>7</sup> focused primarily on Religious Education, but included a chapter entitled 'Church Schools', where it indicated a future in which the role of the churches in education would become crucial. Following the WCC's Uppsala Report 'Durham' recognised that education was now mainly a state enterprise. So the notion of 'partnership with the State' was given prominence, with two distinct aims: “the general education of the whole community” and “Christian nurture” or “instruction in the faith,”<sup>8</sup> although how in practice education and nurture might or should be combined was given no attention. It was recognised that in the past some might have considered these two communities to be the same, when “nation and church were, theoretically, one.....,”<sup>9</sup> but that now the church/society model of the past was clearly differentiated. No longer were membership of the state and membership of the Church of England identical. Now a “twin focus” had to be recognised: the ‘general’ (the local community) and the ‘domestic’ (the church). This was contrasted with the “explicitly domestic” focus of Roman Catholic and Jewish schools. Even though the relationship of the Church of England and the State was not what it had been: “no one sensitive to the mission of the Church of England can deny that, as well as the domestic task which Anglican schools still have, they have inherited the general task of making a direct contribution to the nation's children.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Lambeth Palace Press Release*, 13/10/99, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Op cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 208.



It seems to have been assumed that two endeavours (education and nurture) automatically meant two separate activities and foci. But that confuses what was being delivered with those to whom it was being delivered. Perhaps the model they had in mind was the VC arrangement whereby children could be withdrawn from the general curriculum in order to receive 'denominational' RE. Certainly 'nurture in the Faith' would seem to be relevant only to those who were members of that Faith. Here then were the beginnings of some fundamental confusions that were to be carried forward by those who considered 'Durham' a major contribution to thinking on CE schools. The central part of the chapter on church schools considered arguments against church schools from a variety of perspectives: theological, educational and economic. Its conclusions were pessimistic: "It is likely that we shall have to face the prospect that the church's proportionate contribution to the maintained system will continue to decline, and at a more rapid rate...."<sup>11</sup>

So far as this study is concerned, the Commission's evaluation of the reasons for having church schools at all are particularly significant. It is interesting that the 'establishment' question is specifically linked with society's "general expectation" of baptism being 'on tap', and the Report warned that for the church "to make a distinction...between its members and the community at large may be regarded as an attempt to evade its national responsibilities."<sup>12</sup> This indicates yet another central confusion: between the membership of the church and those whom it seeks to serve. The implication throughout is that they are one and the same. The Commission recognised that over the years the 'privileges' of establishment have become more and more limited: "the church has comparatively few rights within the life of the nation."<sup>13</sup> They concluded: "It is not a simple choice between insisting on 'established' rights throughout the nation's schools on the one hand or confining one's attention to a purely domestic community on the other. It is virtually

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 244.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221.



impossible to draw a clear line round the 'domestic' community of the Church of England."<sup>14</sup> That, of course, is the source of the confusion, and the central ecclesiological issue.

Because no one could any longer claim that church and state were one, so the general and the domestic must be separated, therefore, the Report concluded, the twin focus is the only viable way forward. The church school must give sufficient weight to its mission to the "local community at large" (which is left undefined), and further, "it is right to object to ghetto-like huddles."<sup>15</sup> The church school which serves only children of the church would seem to be beyond the pale. Their interpretation of the 'twin focus' gave more emphasis to the 'general' than the 'domestic', not least because the general constituency is the larger. Certainly the Commission gave no advice as to how the twin focus might work out in practice: how, for example, children would be selected for admission. This omission may have been due to the fact that little emphasis was placed on admissions policies at the time, not least because falling secondary rolls were anticipated.

So what, from the perspective of 'Durham', was to be the future for church schools? The Commission rejected the notion of the church withdrawing from education altogether, although the arguments are more negative than positive: it would be too expensive for LEAs to purchase church schools, and it was not legally possible for the church to give them away!<sup>16</sup> The conclusion was that the church should in future have a "quantitatively reduced role"<sup>17</sup> in education. There was certainly no enthusiasm to build more church schools. The Commission set out its agenda clearly: "(a) church schools are important as providing a means whereby the church's *general presence* in education may be realised' (b) individual church schools are important because they possess *certain educational*

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 248.

*potentialities not necessarily found in schools of other kinds.*"<sup>18</sup> Church schools were needed because they maintained the church's voice in education, and (this was to become a significant issue) because they were somehow distinctive.

These conclusions were later summarised in *The Dual System*,<sup>19</sup> which adopted the view that churches should work "particularly in those areas where Christian compassion should issue in practical schemes, to alleviate social disadvantage or personal disability."<sup>20</sup> Theological arguments for church schools focused on the importance of Establishment as against mere denominationalism: if Establishment means anything at all, then CE schools should be inclusive; to focus on the 'domestic' function would be to accept that the Church of England was one denomination amongst many (and clearly the Commissioners did not believe this to be the case). A later paper, *Crisis in Church Schools*,<sup>21</sup> considered economic issues. But none of the reports concluded that the future for church schools was particularly encouraging.

'The Camberwell Papers' were background papers for a General Synod debate arising out of a conference on *The Church in Education* held at St Gabriel's, Camberwell in April 1977. These make an excellent link between the *Durham Report* (this project was known as 'Durham Revisited') and the *Waddington Report*. As always, the obvious is frequently stated: "Any community which has voluntary schools....should recognise the importance of the fact that its children, alongside their membership of their own community, do hold membership in the wider society."<sup>22</sup> This might be thought to imply that the children of a 'religious community' might be expected to be educated in that voluntary school, and indeed, this is later made explicit: "Parents finding that the school in their neighbourhood

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 250, my italics.

<sup>19</sup> *The Dual System* GS 259, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Crisis in Church Schools* GS Misc, 1972.

<sup>22</sup> *The Camberwell Papers* The National Society/SPCK, 1979, p. 8.



does not sufficiently reflect the characteristics of the community to which they belong should properly be able to exercise the right of parental choice to send their children to a school which does.” So it is quite reasonable for Anglican parents to choose an Anglican school, and logically, equally reasonable for that school to offer places to those parents.

But the papers also majored on the theme: "some would say that the church has to rediscover its role as a servant."<sup>23</sup> While this service might be provided by church schools it was evident that not everyone in the church wanted to pay for them: “some church members feel that the church is getting a poor return for her educational investment.”<sup>24</sup> Why then not leave it to the state? It was at this point that a central issue emerged: “the principal justification for the existence of church schools must therefore be that they have a distinctive contribution to make to the education and nurture of children....a distinctive and corporate attitude to the whole of knowledge and life which are seen within the context of the Christian faith and *sub specie aeternitatis*.”<sup>25</sup> Distinctiveness, almost a passing concept in ‘Durham’, now began to take centre stage.

The 1980s saw tremendous growth in publications about CE schools. Research published in 1981<sup>26</sup> found that there was no evidence of racial discrimination in church schools or a failure to observe LEA ‘banding’ systems to ensure an academically spread intake. Also in 1981 the National Society issued some *Notes for Guidance on Admission of Pupils*.<sup>27</sup> This was a response to the Education Act of 1980 which, for the first time, required governing bodies to publish their admissions policy. Guidance reminded governors of the traditional “twin aims”, and suggested that school policies should include two categories: Foundation and Non-Foundation. Foundation places would be filled by reference to faith allegiance,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> Dummett A & McNeal J (1981).

<sup>27</sup> 81/5.



but other factors (such as geographical) would apply to the non-Foundation places. The guidance made reference to a points' system, while warning that parents might "resort to various undesirable practices in order to increase the points' value of their applications." It also recommended the abolition of the interview, if schools were using this method of allocating places, on the grounds of subjectivity. It is interesting that some 20 years later the DfES reaffirmed the right of church schools to use interviews,<sup>28</sup> only shortly afterwards to abolish it.<sup>29</sup>

A Report of the CE's *Partners in Mission Consultation*<sup>30</sup> criticised the way the church was using its educational resources, and concluded, in typical 'Durham' style:

The churches ecumenically should undertake a major review of church schools, retaining only those which can be seen to have a particular mission in the community as a whole.<sup>31</sup>

Church schools were there to further the church's broader mission, and for no other purpose. Still in 1981 a group of twenty CE secondary schools heads in the London area met at Allington Castle in Maidstone.<sup>32</sup> Noting the antipathy towards church schools displayed in various quarters, not least within the church itself, they argued that in order to gain greater acceptance, church schools needed to be accountable "to the church at large, as well as to society as a whole." This must mean the loss of some autonomy. Coming from a group of Heads, this was a remarkable suggestion. Indeed, in research published five years later, O'Keeffe quoted responses from heads concerned about the lack of effectiveness of Diocesan Education teams, commenting: "There is little incentive to surrender autonomy when there is limited confidence in the expertise and structures of

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<sup>28</sup> *Code of Practice on Admissions* 1999; Department for Education and Skills (prior to June 2001, the Department for Education and Employment).

<sup>29</sup> 2002; to become effective from 2005.

<sup>30</sup> *To A Rebellious House?* CIO Publishing, London, 1981.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> *The Allington Statement.*

diocesan boards of education.”<sup>33</sup> The view of the Allington Heads was that if Diocesan Authorities were able to become more expert, then there could be some negotiation over areas where the individual school would ‘bow’ to the will of the diocese. This could mean that for the first time the Church of England could have a national policy for its schools. The Statement called upon the church to affirm its commitment to church schools, and on church schools themselves to work more co-operatively with county schools, particular in sharing the burden of falling pupil rolls (a national problem during the 1980s).

O’Keeffe approved of ‘Allington’: “such collaborative action could bring church schools more in line with county schools where decisions on admissions policies....would be formulated on an area level, rather than on a local level.....Only then can the ‘dual system’ operate as a partnership between the state and the church.”<sup>34</sup> In December 1982 a second Statement<sup>35</sup> expressed some gratitude that the original paper had been so well received, but bemoaned the fact that nothing seemed to have changed. This second statement provided more detail to the original proposal that church schools should lose some of their autonomy, and the partnership between school governing bodies and the diocese is viewed as a covenant, although recognising that some governing bodies would not want to surrender powers to the Diocese. The Statement concluded with a series of questions: Should the church still be running schools? Why does it do so? Which children should be served by church schools? What should be distinctive about them? The Allington Heads did not, however, supply any answers.

The significance of ‘Allington’ was in it being the first ‘foray’ into the debate of practising heads, as opposed to church officials. These heads wanted the church to provide a considered theological rationale for their schools (although they showed no awareness of

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<sup>33</sup> O’Keeffe B (1986) p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 36 – 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Allington – One Year On.*

the Camberwell Papers). However, from an evidently defensive position, perhaps understandable at the time, they were prepared to compromise on some significant matters. church schools did not, in the 80s or 90s, lose any of their autonomy, and it is arguable whether, if they had, their distinctiveness, so valued by the group, could have been maintained. The Allington heads had not thought through the issues.

Another short but influential document (noted in 'Allington 2'), was issued by the Diocesan Boards of London and Southwark in 1982. It encapsulated the main theological issues in its simple, direct title: *What Are Church Schools For*'. Its author, Prebendary Green, argued that little thought had been given to any rationale for church schools, and that the church was "content to accept them where they found them."<sup>36</sup> He identified a minority of church schools "whose conduct brings no credit upon themselves."<sup>37</sup> While he did not spell out the nature of their 'crime', he contrasted them with the majority which, he claimed, are comprehensive in ability, class and race.

For Green the key issue was admissions policies, and the question: should church schools provide a "service by the church or for the church?"<sup>38</sup> He was right to focus on this issue, but his response proved to be both shallow in its argument, and lacking in historical awareness. Green argued that the first church schools did not see themselves as denominational in any narrow sense. Many were explicitly established for the children of the poor "where the importance of the Christian Faith and morals were emphasised. They [in contrast to the RC sector] were Christian Schools in the service of the community."<sup>39</sup> This statement demonstrates a failure to understand that the majority of church schools were established with a clear denominational purpose, which is possibly why Green found it "ironic" that opponents of CE schools seem happier with the RC model. CE schools, he

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<sup>36</sup> *Op cit.* p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.



accused, were selling their birthright by adopting this confessional model, and in so doing they “may be unwittingly stumbling towards the creation of totally Christian, and *even denominational schools.*”<sup>40</sup>

This is the crux of the issue, because if one were tempted to reply: ‘and what is wrong with that?’ they would not find the answer in Green’s paper, except his allegation (unexamined and arguably inaccurate) that this would be breaking with tradition: “Church schools which are denominational and which glory in being exclusively Anglican by their policy of admissions, have no right to assume that they are an arm of the church, since the church has given them no such mandate.”<sup>41</sup> It is an issue on which the church itself must, argued Green, take sides. Not only should church schools avoid denominationalism (in its pejorative sense), but they should share the current problems of other schools, such as falling rolls. There was no consideration given to what parents wanted for their children, despite the fact that this was a growing political theme (the Conservative Secretary of State proposed to increase the number of parent governors, and established parental right to express a preference for their child’s school).

Green briefly considered the arguments for denominational schools, and found them wanting: the Church of England must accept “pastoral responsibility for all people of the land.”<sup>42</sup> Green gave more consideration to the possibility of church schools (obviously with the ‘right’ admissions policies, examples of which he described) being a means of bridging the sacred-secular divide. However, even here his notion of church schools being “symbols of the church’s involvement in and contribution to the field of education”<sup>43</sup> made the assumption that there was only the one way of so doing. So encapsulated in this paper

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2, my italics.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

was every aspect of the uncritical theo-political liberalism that was to become the neo-orthodoxy of the CE educational hierarchy from the late 80s.

The case against church schools was provided by the Socialist Education Association.<sup>44</sup> The writers claimed that they were not arguing for an end to the Dual system as such, but they had concerns about the way it operated. As the State now supplied the bulk of church school finance so it should exercise greater controls. The principle of having a society that is “equal, harmonious and just”<sup>45</sup> meant that schools should reflect the make-up and needs (including religious needs) of the whole of their local community, rather than what was now just a minority group within it. They complained that the rights of VA school governors to control admissions could hinder reorganisation and maintain ‘hidden’ selection. A single system of admissions would prevent this, with a ‘religious test’ if the church desired one. This test, however, would not be used for discriminating between applicants when the school is oversubscribed; and it is not clear how the authors – who refer to the test indicating “which pupils are acceptable”<sup>46</sup> - saw it working. On the subject of governing bodies and staffing issues, the SEA Report indicated a divergence of opinion between the majority who argued that the only autonomy a VA school should have was its right to teach “a particular religion”. The financial responsibility of VA governors should end, and, to all intents and purposes (apart from the RE) VA schools should be exactly the same as county schools. An appendix, written by Christian SEA members, made positive comments about the work of voluntary schools, highlighting for specific approval the CE’s ‘general’ function. It also recognised the reality of the inculturalisation of education, and found the delivery of education within a Christian context to be quite acceptable. The overall thrust of the SEA document was unsurprising. In the 1980s there was a strong

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<sup>44</sup> *The Dual System of Voluntary and County Schools* SEA 1982; the arguments are discussed in Waddington (1984) pp. 44ff.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.



feeling that the Labour Party would be keen to see the end of church schools, which they viewed as elitist and divisive.

*The Debate about Church Schools in the Diocese of Oxford*<sup>47</sup> considered antagonism towards CE schools from nonconformism ('indoctrination on the rates') to the more recent attacks by the SEA. While affirming the 'twin focus', Gay commented that the church seemed to have shied away from producing "clearly defined policies" for its schools, and that the result was generally a combination of "pragmatism and delicate compromises."<sup>48</sup> This expressed the problem in a nutshell. Gay considered that distinctiveness lay in the ability of church schools to offer a specific context for the delivery of education that accords with parental beliefs and values. This may have been the first time this central point had been so clearly stated.

By the early 1980s, therefore, those committed to church schools may well have felt themselves under attack both from without and within. There followed Robert Waddington's pivotal document.<sup>49</sup> Although intended as a discussion paper, this slim booklet (just over 100 pages) is still regarded, almost 20 years on, as a classic. Waddington's aim was to

....initiate discussion [in order to] examine...some of the pressures upon the maintained system of education.....so that a proper discussion of the future of Voluntary schools and of the endeavour of the Church of England through its own Voluntary schools will be placed in the right context.<sup>50</sup>

However, this aim is set out in such vague terms that it is difficult to know precisely what Waddington had in mind, except the very broad question: 'what is the future for CE VA schools?' Waddington recognised that what he had to say would "please some people and

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<sup>47</sup> Gay (1983).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p 16.

<sup>49</sup> Waddington (1984); Waddington was General Secretary of the Board of Education and the National Society.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.



annoy others,” and he made it clear (without using the term, nor developing the concept) that the existence of church schools had ecclesiological implications: “Church schools are one, but only one, element in the partnership which is not helpfully described as being between church and state.”<sup>51</sup> Why the concept of ‘church and state’ is described as ‘unhelpful’ is not explained, but Waddington was making clear that the establishment of church schools is one aspect of the Establishment relationship.

In a brief survey of the history of CE schools he (too) claimed that the “twin objectives” of their 19<sup>th</sup> century founders were to provide a general education for “the children of the nation, especially the poorer classes” and to provide “education in the Christian religion.” He clearly approved of the perpetuation of those aims via the Voluntary (‘Dual’ – a term Waddington disliked) system; he was also unhappy with ‘denominational school’ (not found in the 1944 Act, but in common usage). Waddington contrasted RC ‘denominational’ provision with the distinctively different “twin focus” of CE schools: “service to the nation’s children and education in the Christian faith.”<sup>52</sup> CE schools were not, in his view, denominational. The difference is that CE schools do not open their doors just to practising CE children, but to ‘the nation’s children’. This is because the Church of England is the church for the nation.

If CE schools ever did become denominational (in the sense Waddington uses the term) then that would imply that the Church of England itself is a denomination. In other words Waddington reiterates the main thrust of the Durham Report, that CE schools should properly reflect an establishment national church ecclesiology. At least Waddington recognised that holding these twin aims together would be a “challenge”.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

Waddington made his most substantial contribution to the debate in a chapter charmingly headed 'No Apology for Theology', although it also carried a warning that the chapter "is brief, explorative and very tentative," together with an invitation that "those with more mature theological understanding may help to extend the discussion."<sup>54</sup> Waddington helpfully goes to the heart of the matter by reflecting on

....the immense size of the Anglican family, [in which] many parents....still seek for their children this *sacrament of membership*...[in which] the church has never adopted a policy of rigorism. It has sought to use the contacts with families at times of baptism as personal opportunities. However, tenuous....is the subsequent contact with the worshipping congregation, the baptised are in membership. Potentially, they share the vision of faith. Could it be the vocation of Christian teachers to awaken in their pupils a capacity to look and at length the ability to see? [But] Faced with hundreds of thousands of baptised children far more than could be coped with by all church schools, there is a temptation to propound a new rigorism.<sup>55</sup>

For Waddington it would seem that the act of baptism is all-sufficient for membership of the church, and that church attendance is, to a certain extent, irrelevant. Rigorism, then, refers both to an approach to baptism that requires church attendance as evidence of genuine family commitment, and also to the church school which is 'tempted' to take practising Anglicans (or Christians) only. Just as the church is not rigorist regarding the one, neither should church schools be rigorist regarding the other. However, Waddington takes no account of the fact that an increasing number of clergy were becoming less happy about what has been termed 'indiscriminate' baptism, and were already laying down certain conditions (such as attendance at a preparation session) before they baptise. Some have more rigorous requirements. However, in drawing attention to baptism, Waddington provided a direct link between admission to the church and admission to the church school.

He also seemed to be arguing that one function of a church school (which he compares with the opportunities provided by baptism visiting) ought to be evangelisation – of those who have not responded to their baptism. Significantly Waddington describes the rigorist

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61, my italics.

(school) approach as a form of “congregationalism”,<sup>56</sup> and not only that but also ‘denominational’.<sup>57</sup> For church schools to seek only to provide for children who are practising members of the church is representative of a ‘gathered church’ mentality. More to the point Waddington could not see any theological (let alone ecclesiological) arguments supporting such a view:

....some administrators would claim *from premises other than those that are theological* that the purpose of church schools is...to collect together the children of practising, believing Christian families.<sup>58</sup>

Waddington worried that if CE schools act in this rigorous ‘denominational’ fashion, then there would no longer be any argument against other Faiths having their own ‘denominational’ schools: “whilst diversity might be increased it would be within a band of denominational difference [rather than] educational diversity”.<sup>59</sup> Is this, he asks, desirable? He confesses some “relief” that the then Secretary of State had not yet made up his mind about the expansion of voluntary provision in this way. So the CE (and the Catholics) could have faith schools; but no-one else! Waddington had no faith-school rationale.

Waddington makes a number of disparaging comments about “rigorist” admissions policies: they are harsher than the church, which “at those moments of family or personal life when people turn to the church, however mixed their motives, however slight their commitment, or however inarticulate their belief, the church errs on the side of love”;<sup>60</sup> they separate the “undifferentiated twin aims of the Church of England with regard to its schools.....the element of service to the nation is neatly sidestepped”;<sup>61</sup> and they “may well

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 62; my italics.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88ff.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 62.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.



breed an introversion that stifles the taking of risks....”<sup>62</sup> He claims that, in any case, children of church families hardly need church schools at all “when home and parish can do so much to sustain nurture in the faith”.<sup>63</sup> The remainder of the chapter offers little more, for the same themes recur again and again, in a somewhat rhetorical style.

It is easy to criticise Waddington’s arguments: the suggestion, for example, that serving only committed Christian families leads to introversion would seem to take no account of the fact that Christian families are themselves ordinary people, with ordinary interests; even Christian families need support and nurture. However, ‘Waddington’ does raise two significant questions: while no Christian would deny the importance of the church ‘being there’ for people at times of crisis, does this require offering either baptism or a place in a church school? Secondly, if arguments could be put forward even as late as the 1970 Durham Report for a ‘general’ function; could those arguments be sustained in the mid-1980s, and can they be sustained any longer?

Waddington did recognise that there are some church schools which, being undersubscribed, do not have much choice in whom they take. Of such schools, he makes two points: that they are “not sufficient indicators of the church’s intentions”, and that they must have “immense problems in manifesting Christian ethos”. In view of the thrust of Waddington’s remarks, in which he clearly supports the ‘general’ function, it is hard to understand what point he is making. If an undersubscribed school is taking ‘all-comers’ i.e. serving an unchurched community, or even a multi-Faith community, in what sense is that not indicative of the church’s intention to use its schools for the general service of the community? And if such schools find it hard to manifest a Christian ethos, is that not an indication that inclusivity dilutes distinctiveness?

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

Waddington recognises:

It is also possible for the vision of the Kingdom to be adulterated to a high-flown philanthropy – a social gospel can easily become activism stripped of the grammar of faith and doctrine that provides its direction. Doing good to others is indeed subsumed within true Christian love and care, but it is not itself *the* gospel or *the Kingdom*....[therefore] one must be highly critical of a model that over-emphasises the philanthropic service to the community at the expense of building a truly Christian ethos in the school....Perhaps the leaven-in-the-lump is a more appropriate image.<sup>64</sup>

Waddington here affirms the “twin focus”; what appears to be new is more considered reflection on what it means for the school to have a distinctive Christian ethos. What Waddington failed to do (as most other writers since then) is to work through the dynamics of how this is to be done, particularly how distinctiveness and what was to be called ‘inclusiveness’ (the twin focus) might be combined. How much leaven, for example, is needed to transform the lump? He confesses: “the difficulty is to translate the theological formulation of the vision into educational practice.”<sup>65</sup> Where he is rather more successful is in setting out his vision for a distinctively Christian school.<sup>66</sup> However, the points he makes do seem to presuppose a committed Christian, and worshipping, community, with a substantial complement of committed Christian teachers.

Because the Waddington Report is written in such a discursive, almost conversational, style it is not easy to extract much of an explicit nature which would answer the question: ‘what *is* the purpose of CE schools?’. Nevertheless, there are a few indicators of the direction in which Waddington wishes schools to take: to “provide a valid critique both of the prevailing secular ideology in education and some of the sociological theory which undergirds it with rational and scientific arguments;”<sup>67</sup> to share in the task of creating, in Eliot’s phrase, “well-being in the community....[which] it helps colour from the Christian

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 66 ff, usefully summarised p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

vision”;<sup>68</sup> and to ‘train’ pupils “by helping them to know what to look for in the Christian vision and to set them on the arduous quest for its ultimate apperception”.<sup>69</sup> All these are worthy aims, but only the last gets near to making a substantial point: education may be offered from within the values context of a Christian community. But for whom is such an education appropriate?

Although Waddington briefly discusses issues for a multi-Faith society,<sup>70</sup> there is little that specifically relates to church schools, except a suggestion that church schools might make a “creative bid to form multi-racial communities”<sup>71</sup>, and another that in CE schools with a majority of children of other Faiths, the governors “surrender” their Anglican majority for a few years.<sup>72</sup> He does not point out, in the first instance, that this does not preclude those communities from being entirely Christian, nor does he explain in what sense a CE school which has surrendered its church majority on the governing body remains a CE school.

His views on admissions policies are, however, clear. The

.....freedom to construct an admissions policy remains one of the most important aspects of Aided status....[however] admissions policies that are weighted in favour of a single criterion (such as place of residence or religious affiliation) are likely to produce inequalities in the system and should be avoided.<sup>73</sup>

Such policies should, furthermore, reflect the title of Bishop Sheppard’s book: ‘Bias to the Poor’.<sup>74</sup> Despite applauding the right of governing bodies to formulate their own admissions policies, he also argues that such policies should be part of a diocesan policy – that places immediate limitations on the freedom of governing bodies. Waddington does, in

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 34ff.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 46 – 47.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.



fact, provide model policies in an appendix,<sup>75</sup> and offers a few suggestions as to how principle might be turned into practice. However, he makes two significant points: firstly, whatever the aims of church schools, “it would be a mistake to suppose [that they] will result in a single model.”<sup>76</sup> Waddington does not suggest how much variety could be tolerated. Were there any models that the church would disown? However, this stress on the permissibility of a variety of model of CE schools was to be affirmed by the Chairman of the Board of Education in 2001, ironically at a time when church civil servants seemed to be pressing for a one-fit-all model. Secondly, the ethos and character of a church school should “have sprung from efforts to reflect theologically about the *educational* aims of the school.”<sup>77</sup> But will theological reflection include ecclesiological reflection? Is there any evidence that governing bodies are equipped for such reflection? And finally, why should that reflection be restricted to educational aims?

One of the reasons why the Waddington Report was so valued was that it met a need in seeking to provide a theological rationale for CE Schools, particularly secondary schools.

Waddington claimed that

....education, a process which helps to shape the visions humans have of a particular cultural world and which indicates how personal and communal fulfilment within a particular society might be achieved, has aroused relatively little interest among theologians....[and that] in spite of the vigorous contributions that have been made since the 1870s to validate the contribution of the Church of England to the education service of the nation through its schools, there has been little written within the vision of faith as articulated in theology.<sup>78</sup>

He complained that church civil servants had tended to become too tied up with “pragmatic or utilitarian courses of action” (roofs and drains) rather than “make it plain that their

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 99 ff; the model ignored is the school which specifically serves committed Anglican, or Christian, families.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 99; his italics.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60.

contributions are illuminated by faith and mature theological reflection”<sup>79</sup>. In fact, the ten distinctive characteristics which he listed for CE schools have been frequently reproduced in other CE school literature,<sup>80</sup> and have been enormously influential. They were to become one of the source texts of what might be called the ‘distinctiveness movement’. For that alone the church owes a great debt to Waddington.

*A Future in Partnership* was swiftly followed by the GS Paper *Positive Partnership*<sup>81</sup> which put the green paper in a more digestible form for members of the General Synod, but which again stressed the need for much greater theological reflection on church school issues. One of the issues touched upon but not developed by Waddington was the multi-faith school. This was considered in rather more detail in a discussion paper written by Geoffrey Duncan.<sup>82</sup> Duncan himself tells<sup>83</sup> of how, shortly after he had taken up his post of Schools Officer (and Assistant General Secretary) Waddington told him that he urgently needed a paper on multi-cultural issues, and asked him if he would write it for him! Duncan claimed to have no knowledge of the subject at all, but did as he was asked. In fact, Duncan’s very well researched paper became highly regarded, and was commended by Lord Swann, even though the Swann Report itself<sup>84</sup> had relatively little to say about church schools. The Swann Commission was divided on the desirability of extending the right to have their own schools to other Faith communities.

The neglect in Swann (not a church document) was only partly put right by *Faith in the City*.<sup>85</sup> This seminal CE document, so ‘church of the nation’ in its implied ecclesiology, surprisingly had relatively little new to say about the role of church schools in the inner

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>80</sup> E.g. Duncan G (1990).

<sup>81</sup> GS 686 (1985).

<sup>82</sup> Duncan (1984).

<sup>83</sup> Interviewed in October 2000.

<sup>84</sup> *Education for All* 1985.

<sup>85</sup> Church House Publishing, 1985.

city, simply accepting some of the stereotypical criticisms which were to penetrate Bernadette O’Keeffe’s research (much of which was being gathered at the time), and making some breathtakingly sweeping assertions on a limited evidential base: "There is a possible clash between the aims of church schools and the need for racial harmony and justice".<sup>86</sup> The statement is only retrieved by the use of the word 'possible'. However, the claim that the reason why church schools are (allegedly) antipathetic to children of other Faiths is that they want to teach the Christian Faith, shows the total lack of understanding not only of church schools, but of the purpose of Religious Education. One can only wonder what communication there was between the two relevant Boards of the Church of England.

The following year Bernadette O’Keeffe published research<sup>87</sup> which questioned the role of the church schools so as to cast doubt on the possibility of there being any theological rationale for them at all. O’Keeffe’s study focused on a single, significant, issue: "...how church schools see their role in multicultural, multiracial and multifaith society."<sup>88</sup> This made a clear link with Duncan’s paper and ‘Swann’.

The point was made, correctly, although with some disapproval (as with ‘Allington’), that the various educational bodies within the Church of England, at all levels, while they may express a view on admissions to church schools, have "no power to enforce these views on schools. O’Keeffe’s agenda is represented by quotations from two diocesan directors of education<sup>89</sup> who deplored the "tiny minority of schools" (not a minority of secondary schools<sup>90</sup>) which "tend to emphasise the church links rather than those of the community and this occasionally causes problems" (one Director) or which "exercise a very selective

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<sup>86</sup> 13.61, p. 307.

<sup>87</sup> O’Keeffe (1986).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. x.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

<sup>90</sup> As demonstrated by O’Keeffe’s own research where she found 87% of CE secondary schools in her study giving preference to "children from practising Anglican homes", *Ibid.* p. 21.



CE policy and cause continual controversy” (the other). These latter are chastised by O’Keeffe as being “most likely to frustrate any move by the [Diocese] to introduce an admissions policy for all its schools”<sup>91</sup>, despite the fact that she has already made it clear that Dioceses have no such power in any case. What had, presumably, begun as an objective study had already (by page 20) shown where its bias lay. The disapproval is made explicit: “...church schools’ admissions policies in oversubscribed situations are far removed from the policy adopted by the founders of the National Society”.<sup>92</sup> This judgement is yet another misreading of history.

It is self-evident that: “it is in oversubscribed situations that the admissions criteria are applied rigidly”.<sup>93</sup> When a school does not have more applicants than places then its admissions policy is essentially irrelevant, unless, of course (as has been the practice in some RC schools) it decides not to fill to its capacity, in order to maintain the proportion of its Faith intake.<sup>94</sup> But the converse is also true: when a school becomes oversubscribed, then it comes under pressure to become more religiously selective. This is illustrated in the history of one of the schools involved in this research of which O’Keeffe clearly approved,<sup>95</sup> as well as by the comment of a Head quoted by O’Keeffe.<sup>96</sup> But the debate in the 1980s was about rather more than admissions policies, and was to be overtaken by the provisions of the Conservative Government’s 1988 Education Reform Act. If the complaint of many county school heads was that “church schools are seen in general as having far more control in shaping their own destinies”<sup>97</sup>, then all that was to change. The ‘privileges’ (if that is what they were) of church schools were to be made available to all. Even if they had not been, then the complaint that voluntary aided schools were exercising

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>94</sup> This right was removed by the 2002 Education Act.

<sup>95</sup> I was Head of this school and a respondent to the O’Keeffe research, at the time; this point is, in fact, explicitly recognised by O’Keeffe (1986) p. 33: “many church schools’ admissions policies have evolved in response to immediate problems and pressures”.

<sup>96</sup> O’Keeffe (1986) p. 24.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

their rights<sup>98</sup> is simply a complaint about the 1944 settlement, possibly (although the point is accepted uncritically by O’Keeffe) exacerbated by the open enrolment provisions of the 1980 Education Act.

O’Keeffe rightly explores a crucial issue for CE Schools. Why do parents want them? Is it because they are religious people who want their children educated in a Christian environment? Or are there other more (or less) hidden agendas? According to O’Keeffe’s research, using a small base of only 139 parents, almost 50% gave the religious (either narrowly CE or more broadly Christian) reason as their most important. O’Keeffe takes pains to point out the accuracy of this survey,<sup>99</sup> although on this significant issue, one has to take at least some account of the possibility that some parents are giving the answer they think is wanted, or expected. What is clear, as further such surveys were to show, is that there has always existed, a complex of reasons (especially academic performance and discipline) why parents choose a church school.

O’Keeffe reserves the greatest criticism for church schools which exclude children of other Faiths, and hence were allegedly divisive. Many admissions policies “are implicitly and explicitly stating that their schools are for Christians”. But that simply raises the question: ‘Why shouldn’t they be?’ It may mean that their school communities are less culturally diverse, and that is an important matter for them,<sup>100</sup> but whether that point alone is a fair criticism is a separate issue. Mono-cultural schools may have certain effects, like “causing (cultural and ethnic) imbalance” for other schools<sup>101</sup>, but that charge might also be levelled at the Community School in an all-white (or all-black) geographical area. The conclusion of ‘Christians Against Racism and Fascism’, quoted by O’Keeffe (“in some areas church

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32 and p. 33.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39.

schools have become white enclaves using religion as a means of discrimination”<sup>102</sup>), is a simplistic and pejorative description of a rather more complex set of issues. What was of particular interest was the fact that having been asked to comment on the statement, many heads “were either unable to answer the question, were reluctant to comment, or had no firm views....there was no real questioning of such a controversial statement”. It is sad that they felt this way. It is hoped that this research will provide the opportunity for that failure of the 80s to be redressed.

Also in 1986 the Socialist Educational Association – continuing its attack – published another paper,<sup>103</sup> which argued that voluntary schools should admit a greater diversity of intake. This, it was felt, could be done without harming the distinctive ethos of the school. There is no argument offered to support this claim. The suggestion was also made that county schools should work harder to meet the needs of religious communities.

The reaction of the church to O’Keeffe’s research was so strongly negative that she was almost bounced<sup>104</sup> into facilitating a response. *Schools for Tomorrow*,<sup>105</sup> subtitled: ‘Building Walls or Building Bridges?’, included contributions from church officers. Again, O’Keeffe is mainly concerned with the broader issue of education in a multi-cultural society, and she explicitly ties this to the need to rehabilitate religious education. This seems difficult in community, secular schools, and she claimed (reiterating her somewhat dubious conclusions from her previous research) that although religion is healthy in church schools, “the faith needs of children of other faiths who attend church schools are not catered for”.<sup>106</sup> Two essays deal specifically with CE schools: Geoffrey Duncan’s on

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>103</sup> *All faiths in All Schools.*

<sup>104</sup> Conversation with Geoffrey Duncan.

<sup>105</sup> O’Keeffe (1988a).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.



serving the community, and Robert Burgess's agenda for the future, although the latter did not address issues relevant to this study.

Duncan, Assistant to Colin Alves (Waddington's successor in 1984), was to become General Secretary from 1990 until retirement in 1998. Throughout his period in office Duncan was an active proponent for the 'service/general' side of the twin focus, although he never rejected the other side, arguing consistently that there had always been a variety of model for CE schools. Inevitably and perhaps ironically (looking at its proponents) although this was apparently not recognised at the time, the call for service was to run headlong into the demand for distinctiveness. How can one genuinely hold onto a 'general role' (in the Durham sense) and yet maintain something essentially distinctive? This was to be the problem most steadfastly ignored by church officials.

Duncan developed the notion of partnership central to 'Waddington'. He did so evidently defensively, referring directly to the negative effect of O'Keeffe's research on the credibility of the Dual System.<sup>107</sup> The problem, he argued, was the tension between the innate conservatism of the established church, and the opportunity for church schools, having rather more autonomy than community schools, to innovate. He recognised the pressures of an increasingly secular society on church schools to withdraw from, or place limits on, the service model: "...while happy to receive children of other faiths [they] are not willing to make any concessions to, or recognition of, faiths other than Christianity, at least as far as the school's worship and religious education is concerned."<sup>108</sup> In other words he perceived a tendency to draw inwards, somewhat (he claims) like the RC nurture model. Duncan clearly had little time for this process; those who follow it "have yet to show they have fully thought out the implications, not least the likelihood of a very patchy

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 145.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 147.

distribution of church schools throughout the country.”<sup>109</sup> It is difficult to see why that should be the consequence; indeed, it may be argued that parental support for church schools may have the opposite effect. Of course, Duncan is referring to the whole range of church schools, and it may well be the case, as he suggests, that the negative effects would be felt by rural primary schools, not by secondary schools. In any case, he argued, how can the church justify turning its back on serving the community?

Duncan was right to conclude that the essential task for the future was to ‘thrash out’ a theological, educational and practical rationale, although he seems to restrict his focus to the ‘service’ role. Crucial to this exercise is, he believed, working out and clarifying attitudes to other Faiths.<sup>110</sup> This, he predicted, would be the great issue for church schools in the 21st Century. But was he right? In recent years the ‘New Labour’ Government appears to have heeded the plea from other Faith communities that they, too, should be allowed to have their own schools. There is little doubt that these will not see themselves as having any broad community role as, of course, neither does the Roman Catholic Church. Where does that leave CE Schools? The answer may be demonstrated, at least in part, by the CE secondary school in Preston which, having adopted a positive policy towards admitting children from other Faith Communities, received a rebuff from the very families clamouring for places when a Muslim school was established in the same town. This might suggest that the church school is a convenience so long as it is the only religious option.

There can be no doubt, as Duncan states,<sup>111</sup> that the theological issue of inter-Faith dialogue is a central issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; but just how central this debate is to be for church schools still remains to be seen. When the Anglican Primates made a joint

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* p. 147.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151-152.

declaration of belief in 2002, they made it clear that they regarded Christianity as unique and (uniquely) true. Quite how that sits with the notion of church schools welcoming children of other Faiths is a puzzle; perhaps the answer is to be found in a variation of the 'nurture' model? However, if the debate about serving the community is seen purely in terms of faith, it fails to take seriously the bulk of the community which has no religious faith at all.

Two years earlier a celebratory collection of essays had been published by the National Society,<sup>112</sup> including a retrospective and prospective essay on church schools, again by Duncan. He referred to the opposition to church schools and the (consequent?) 'angst' within the church about them. Was what Duncan quoted (with evident agreement) as "hesitation and doubt in church circles"<sup>113</sup> over the role of church schools a reaction to the criticism that appeared to be growing in the 1980s on the political Left (Duncan explicitly deplores what he saw as a tendency for church schools to become identified with Tory policy - this criticism increased with the advent of grant maintained status), or was it a fundamental lack of understanding, or nerve, within the church itself? In a wide ranging, yet brief essay Duncan touches on a number of significant issues: the multi-Faith CE school ("is it really impossible or inadvisable to evolve and propagate a role and policy for a church school in such circumstances"<sup>114</sup>), the "indefinable" ethos, staff appointments ("church schools will still be faced with the challenge of recruiting teachers who have positive reasons for wishing to work in them"), and so on. Duncan affirms that "while the country continues to be other than uniform, there will continue to be more than one possible model for church schools..."<sup>115</sup> and concluded by restating the need for careful

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<sup>112</sup> Leonard G & Yates J (eds) (1986).

<sup>113</sup> 'Church Schools: Present and Future' in Leonard & Yates (eds) (1986) p. 67.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p. 75.



consideration of a theological rationale for the church's involvement in education. This, he says, is the 'kairos'.<sup>116</sup>

Duncan raised the central issue of purpose, and quoted<sup>117</sup> remarks made by Leslie Francis questioning the "'community' or 'service' model and, indeed, the very concept of partnership as currently practised, and it is worth, in the context of considering Duncan's position, exploring why Francis was being criticised by him. Francis had argued that the "'official response of the Church of England...is quick to defend church schools precisely by denying their distinctiveness'".<sup>118</sup> Francis had reflected on the purpose of church schools, in *Church and School, a future for Christian Education*:<sup>119</sup> they were "a good testing ground for the development of a theology of education", which he saw as "a branch of applied or practical theology".<sup>120</sup> He believed it to be essential that the historical context be considered, and he found a clear contrast with the Roman Catholic 'nurture' model, where the RC school is a "believing and integrated Christian community"<sup>121</sup> which supporting the nurturing role of the family (the 'domestic' model). Historically CE schools have had a more "complex" role. However, times were changing. Just as some RC schools (in areas of falling school – or church – rolls) were taking more non-Catholics, and so

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* p. 75.

<sup>118</sup> The source of the quotation from Francis is simply given as a conference in Southwark Diocese; email correspondence with Francis (8/05/01) has determined that there is no longer any copy of the particular paper available.

<sup>119</sup> Duncan refers to this paper having been published by the Culham College Institute in 1986. I have been unable to trace it, and communication with Culham College elicited the response: "I fear that the mists of antiquity have probably enveloped this one. Certainly it was not something we published formally with an ISDN number"; source: e-mail from John Gay 14/9/01. Correspondence with Francis himself brought a similar response: "If my memory serves me correctly, the title 'Church and School....' existed as a conference paper, and not as something published under that title"; source: letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 2001. Duncan insisted that such a paper had existed, but he no longer had a copy; source: telephone conversation 11/9/01. Francis helpfully sent me a copy of an article ('Theology of Education') published four years later in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (Volume XXXVIII, No. 4, November 1990, pp. 349-364) which, he believed, 'represented' the thrust of the other paper, and this will be used to examine Francis' ideas, before pursuing Duncan's arguments with them.

<sup>120</sup> *Art cit.* p. 34.

<sup>121</sup> Quoting here from the 1981 Report to the RC Bishops of England and Wales *Signposts and Homecomings* Middlegreen, St Paul Publications.

‘diluting’ their nature, so some Anglican schools, especially secondary schools, were becoming more ‘domestic’. Francis commented perceptively:

The need today...is for a theology of education which is both able to work with the reality of the church schools system as it is, and also shape that system to meet the religious and educational challenges of the next decade.<sup>122</sup>

The church needed to recognise the reality, and try to find some theological undergirding for it, if such is possible. In fact it has spent energy defending a model which has become increasingly difficult to justify.

Francis noted five “key areas of debate”. Three reflecting society’s trend to both secularism and religious pluralism are summed up: ‘why should the Church of England any longer have the influence it used to have in education?’ The remaining two went to the heart of the tension between education (including religious education) and nurture (including catechesis), and the rather odd position of school worship which somehow (in terms of the legal requirements) straddles the two. Crucial to the purpose of church schools must be the question: ‘how are education and nurture to be kept in balance?’ This was a question which Duncan (et al) and ultimately the Dearing Review fatally (in terms of achieving its aims) failed to address with either seriousness or conviction.

Francis outlined the main thrust of research into church schools and related issues. Of particular relevance is his contention (that in 1990) “comparatively little is known about the functioning of Church of England secondary schools”.<sup>123</sup> He cited O’Keeffe’s research as an exception. He made his own contribution based on a “tripartite distinction between nurture, service and prophecy”.<sup>124</sup> ‘Nurture’ is defined as being “concerned with the nature of Christian upbringing”, and is the concern “expressed by Christian parents who wish

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<sup>122</sup> *Art. cit.* p. 351.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 354.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p. 356.



their children to grow and develop within the overall context of the Christian faith". Like catechesis, nurture has "the potential for integrating the perspectives of church, home and school".

Paul Hirst<sup>125</sup> had advanced the proposition that education and nurture are mutually incompatible. The first seeks to open up questions for the student to explore, while the latter tends to be more concerned with providing unequivocal answers. The tension is even greater in religious education in a church school: is the aim to provide as neutral an approach as possible ('this is what Christians believe'), or to provide Faith-based teaching ('this is true'?). Referring to John Hull's use of the concept of 'critical autonomy', Francis showed how nurture can be distinguished from both education and indoctrination. As a religious Faith Christianity, or at least much of it, is open to criticism; as such it is capable of enabling enquiries to be made about itself which, if not identical with the educative process, are not inimical to it. It is not something which, in principle, would be ruled out in schools, although (and Francis did not pursue this) it would probably be ruled out for any Faiths which lack the willingness, or the ability, to be self-critical, including some Christians. But even if nurture is not, in principle, ruled out, is the school the appropriate place for it to take place? Francis considers three traditional (and even then "thin") responses to this question: the notion that the churches should provide Christian teachers for the maintained system; that nurture is not a role for the county (now community) school at all; and that the Roman Catholic Church considered schools essential to complement the nurturing role of the church and home. With none of these, he believed, either acceptable or workable (he reflected on the difficulty that the Roman Catholics have in keeping their traditional model viable) the answer is to

....look afresh at the possibilities and problems inherent in a system of ecumenical church schools operated as a distinctive Christian alternative to predominantly

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<sup>125</sup> In 'Christian education: a contradiction in terms' *Learning for Living* 11, 4, 1972, pp. 6 – 11 and 'Education, catechesis and the church school' *British Journal of Religious Education*, 3, 1981, pp. 85 – 93.



secular system of county schools. Here is an opportunity for the theology of Christian nurture to re-shape the present provision of denominational voluntary aided schools.<sup>126</sup>

This was a radical suggestion, because it broke away from traditional models, inviting a new response. It is unfortunate that Francis took the idea no further, for he could have provided a rationale for the nurture model which, although working in practice in many places, had never been given much attention by the church. There were, at the time, just a few formally-ecumenical schools around, although the proposed closure of the Joint Anglican/RC schools in Oxford during 2001 in order to create a RC (only) school, shows their vulnerabilities. But there were also (and are presently) many CE schools which enable their vocation to transcend denominational barriers, and welcome Christians of all denominations; these are informally-ecumenical schools. In an age where ecumenical partnerships are common, and denominational differences given a much lower profile, this could be an excellent example of a 'nurturing school'. It would seem logical, however, that the only homes which would have an interest in Christian nurture would be committed Christian homes. Why would parents who themselves are not committed members of any Faith want their children to be nurtured as Christians?

Francis addressed the 'theology of service', concerned "with the churches' perceived responsibility for the needs of those who are not members, as much as those who are members". He reminded his readers that, historically, service was not entirely indifferent; that there was always a subtext of mission. He noted that "following the analysis of the Durham Report, mission and evangelism are now generally seen as inappropriate aspects of the churches' theology of service in education". That view has now been overturned by 'Dearing'. For Francis service was 'for service's sake'. Again, he raised an issue which

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<sup>126</sup> *Art cit.* pp. 357 – 358.

had hardly been addressed by others, and which 'Dearing' was to fudge: how is the service role to be combined with the demand for distinctiveness? In his view:

A church committed to a theology of service in education should be able to operate within an educational system in which key educational decisions on the purpose and character of schools are made on educational grounds and not on theological grounds.<sup>127</sup>

In other words it is sufficient (for the service model) for the church school simply to be a good school. Furthermore, the nurture and service roles should not either be confused or combined: no 'twin focus' is possible. Both are defensible, but the "two commitments should operate separately and cannot be confused within the one school".<sup>128</sup> This advice went directly against 'Waddington', and would be ignored by 'Dearing'. He further suggested that the VA school should deal with 'nurture', and the VC school with 'service'.

Francis' 'theology of prophecy' is

....concerned with testing current social reality against an understanding of God's declared purposes for his creation.<sup>129</sup>

Here there would seem little practical role for church schools, for it is the church itself that must speak, within and without, on educational matters. The prophetic voice should "bring into the open the assumptions and values involved....and to subject them to public scrutiny. Without this perspective of prophetic theology, educational analysis itself is surely incomplete."<sup>130</sup> However, it is not enough for the church to speak; it must also practise. Francis argued that institutional investment in schools gives the church the authority to speak on educational matters, and to "test and to implement its prophetic voice in direct relationship with its theology of nurture and theology of service". Certainly, the

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 358.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 360.



latter must be the case; but is it so for the former? Surely the church does not need to run hospitals to be able to speak with a “prophetic voice” on matters relating to health care?

Francis concluded by recognising the difficulties inherent in some of his proposals:

....at key points sharp conflict may emerge between the practical implications and expressions of the theology of nurture on the one hand and a theology of service on the other. The very values represented by the development of a network of ecumenical and distinctively Christian schools may well not only contradict the values most cherished by schools committed to radical Christian service to the community, but also conflict with certain Christian expectations and hopes for the state maintained system of education as a whole.

In the light of the Dearing Report and its aftermath this was a prophetic voice indeed. Francis’ paper was full of fresh and incisive ideas. They were not, however, to penetrate the consciousness of the Church of England. Indeed, they received criticism. Duncan complained<sup>131</sup> that Francis did not address admissions policies. That is quite true. Francis’ main interest was in the role of church schools in a predominantly secular society. But “he gives little guidance for schooling in areas where there is a substantial proportion of adherents of other faiths, no one of which is strong enough to set up an aided school but who might prefer a sensitive Church of England school to one with a secular foundation....”<sup>132</sup>

Francis actually argued that there is a danger that the distinctiveness of church school will be watered down by the service model. Indeed, that there is no need for Christian distinctiveness in such schools. This is precisely what has happened to Baptism. It has become so available, at so little cost, that it has lost much of its meaning. What kind of distinctiveness and meaning? Perhaps part of the answer must be another question: ‘what goes to make a particular community distinctive?’ In what sense is a church school with 100% Muslim pupil intake a ‘Christian community’?

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<sup>131</sup> In O’Keeffe (1988a) p. 147.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.



For Duncan “...a Christian rationale for a service to the community role quite different from that feared by Dr Francis, is possible if it contains two important, traditional Christian elements: a prophetic perspective and a sense of vision”.<sup>133</sup> The ‘voice of prophecy’ asks “what we are doing to keep children rooted in something firm and stable in what could be a bewildering morass of variety....[and what the educational system is doing] to help prepare its children for difference and to give them constructive options of coping with it to the benefit of the general good and to the ideal of diversity in unity”. Duncan concluded that the prophetic voice he was hearing was “the one that asks if church schools mainly for Christians (rather than provided by Christians) in the closing years of this century and beyond are the best way of facing up to the challenges and opportunities of difference”.<sup>134</sup> Duncan seemed to forget that all schools have a role in preparing their pupils for difference; it is not a matter of fact that the only way this can be done is by church schools having wide admissions policies; bearing in mind that church secondary schools are in a clear minority, the same question has to be asked of community schools in the leafy suburbs! The key, recognised by Francis, is that Britain is no longer a Christian society - it is, at best, ‘post-Christian’.

It is clear that the whole debate about church schools in the mid- to late-1980s, although focusing on the general issue of service versus nurture, was dominated by one issue - the multi-Faith society – and had the effect of deflecting the debate away from its essence: the purpose of having church schools at all. The CE Board of Education established a ‘Voluntary Principle’ Working Party during the period January 1988 to March 1989. While no official report was produced, the then General Secretary of the Board, Colin Alves, produced his “own reflections” on its deliberations.<sup>135</sup> The secretary to the group was Hugh Benzie, who had been Head of St Luke’s, Southsea – a school which (in Durham language)

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151.

<sup>135</sup> Alves C (1991).

fulfilled the 'general' function (and in so doing has been in some difficulties over many years), and Alves acknowledged his influence on the thinking of the group.

Here again we find the principle that in an ideal world "all parents should be able to choose to have their children educated in ways consonant with their religious beliefs."<sup>136</sup> This is one that has often been repeated – not least by the Secretary of State in her address to the General Synod in November 2001 – but which appears never to be taken seriously, for it provides a rationale not for the inclusive 'service' model, but for the relatively exclusive 'nurture' function. It is noteworthy that the 1998 Human Rights Act provided that "in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education, and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."<sup>137</sup>

Alves then became simply another who, having proclaimed the principle, immediately ignored it. His reason was (as he put it) that in the real world compromises have to be made, and some of those compromises may be divisive (Northern Ireland is given as an example). Whatever else, a state monopoly is unacceptable, and so there does need to be alternatives in educational provision, "although it is by no means self-evident what those alternative forms should be."<sup>138</sup> Alves celebrates the Church of England's historic role as a provider of education, and then, almost inevitably, focuses on the Establishment:

....both church and state are for the most part content that the latter is allowed at least to 'wear the clothes' appropriate to its role within a Christian society.....[and the church] seems to act in the belief that unless it uses every opportunity presented to it (including the privileges of establishment) to seek to maintain its inheritance of

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid* p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> This provision was tested in *R (K) v Newham London Borough Council* in 2003, where Mr Justice Newman ruled that the LEA must draw parents' attention to their right to set out their philosophical and religious convictions for their preference for a particular school; source: *Education Law Monitor* Vol 9, No. 4, April 2002, pub. Informa Law.

<sup>138</sup> Alves (1991) p. 5.



Christian culture the British society will move inexorably from its present 'neutral' position to one of outright 'paganism'.<sup>139</sup>

The above is presented as one view. An alternative view sees nothing essentially British/English that the church needs to protect. Britain has always been a cultural melting pot. The church should recognise that it operates in a society that is not only multi-Faith, but one where the Christian churches are working to an ecumenical agenda. Why should the church have a privileged position in education? Several arguments are presented: the church is commissioned to "bear witness to the gospel of redemption and to press for a response from all people"; the values undergirding society are Christian, and education should preserve an element of spirituality; the partnership between church and state has benefits for both; church involvement is a "built-in protection against manipulation of the education system by the state"; the scope of parental choice is increased; church schools can mediate "Christian culture to the next generation".<sup>140</sup> This does not go quite so far as the 'Dearing' plea for church schools to be tools of evangelism, but certainly goes down that path.

Alves then asks, but makes little effort to address, some central questions concerning church schools: distinctiveness ("particularly important in these days of competition for survival"<sup>141</sup>), the church school serving the community (altruistically and anonymously or as a "positive witness"?), and of course, the central question as to the church's purpose in having church schools at all. While Alves reflects on whether the National Society's emphasis (in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) had been on providing education for the poor, or providing it 'in the Principles of the Established Church', he does not answer the question! He then refers, somewhat prophetically in the light of the General Synod's resolution eight years later, to the central task of the church (and so by implication its schools) being mission, but

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.



he again fails to examine the issue. In fact, this chapter ends with reference to just one issue previously raised, which is clearly the important issue for him; if there were no church schools parental choice would be limited.

Alves tackles the “conflicting principles....freedom and fairness”, each of which restricts the other,<sup>142</sup> and it appears inevitable that independence leads to privilege, and “all choices have moral connotations”. Is it

....actually immoral for a parent to choose a school because that school offers education based on a particular religious or other principles? By the same token is it actually immoral to choose a school because it offers greater educational scope than other schools?<sup>143</sup>

He seems to conclude that the purchase of privilege (what he saw public schools, many being Christian foundations, providing) is morally dubious. He then considers a number of scenarios involving church schools (the Vicar in a UPA parish who sends his child out of the parish to the ‘safety’ of a VA school), and here he argues that although church schools do offer privilege, to be rid of them would be “to give too much weight to the concept of fairness and too little to that of parental choice”.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, one of the motives of the National Society was to provide choice, and there still needs to be choice for parents today who cannot afford fee-paying schools. Alves raised what would have then been the very real and worrying prospect that a future Labour Government might do away with voluntary schools altogether – hindsight demonstrates that the precise opposite was to be the case! On almost the last page he refers to the view of the working party that admissions policies should “take account of the needs of the local community as well as of the sponsoring community”.<sup>145</sup> The twin focus again, but without attempt to evaluate the issues.

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

In 1990 when Duncan succeeded Alves as General Secretary, he was succeeded in his post by David Lankshear. Lankshear had been successively Head of a church primary school, Diocesan Adviser, and a Diocesan Director of Education. On the general/domestic divide (to use the Durham terms), if Duncan articulated the former, it was Lankshear whose writings seemed to point more and more forcibly towards the latter, although whether he himself perceived that as a shift in direction, or recognised the implications of such a shift, is difficult to say. He was responsible for three publications in 1992: *A Shared Vision: Education in Church Schools*,<sup>146</sup> *Looking for quality in a Church School*,<sup>147</sup> and *Governing Church Schools*.<sup>148</sup> Whilst the latter pair of publications would definitely fall into the ‘pamphlet’ category, *A Shared Vision* is a little more substantial (still only 116 pages), although as Lankshear himself points out, it was not his intention to “make this an academic book in that I have not sought to root all the arguments in the literature of the philosophy and theology of education. Rather it is intended to stimulate thought, discussion and action both with reference to the areas that are covered within its pages, and with reference to those that are perceived to have been omitted.”<sup>149</sup> In fact the book is stronger on anecdote than on analysis.

Inventing imaginary admissions policies, he explores their implications. He points out the difficulties governing bodies have in implementing their policies; and he, too, makes the distinction (although he does not use the Durham terminology) between the ‘general’ and the ‘domestic’ functions, making the point that “most CE Aided Schools would identify with one of these two principles and some would see themselves as embracing both”.<sup>150</sup> He considers some of the reasons why parents choose church schools for their children, both negative (to ‘escape’) and positive (because they take religion seriously); and he considers

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<sup>146</sup> Lankshear D (1992a).

<sup>147</sup> Lankshear (1992b).

<sup>148</sup> Lankshear (1992c).

<sup>149</sup> *Op cit.* p.10.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23



some of the implications for the schools. We should not be surprised, after Lankshear's disclaimer, that none of these issues is examined in any depth. Despite this, however, the booklet may be considered important in that it was yet another published argument for distinctiveness: a notion that was to have a significant effect on the development of new attitudes towards CE schools, and, possibly, after the criticisms of the 80s, a new confidence within them.

Lankshear's movement away from the emphases of his predecessor may be seen in snippets from the other two publications. In *Looking for Quality* Lankshear argued that church schools

....should witness to the gospel both in its daily life and in the way it makes contact with the communities beyond its gate. It is part of the Body of Christ and as such will recognise a special relationship with the parish, the diocese and the wider church.<sup>151</sup>

The emphasis is on service to the church itself. Indeed, in 'Governing Church Schools', he goes even further when he claims that the church and the church school should be "so interwoven that there is never an opportunity for people at the school to feel neglected, nor for members of the church to feel ignorant about the school."<sup>152</sup> Lankshear also recognised the need for church schools to appoint Christian staff.

The greater emphasis on distinctiveness was driven, in part, by the new inspection regime. In 1993 Lankshear published a further booklet *Preparing for Inspection in a Church School*,<sup>153</sup> which gave advice to schools on how they needed to respond to the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Much of the booklet consists of practical advice. It is of continuing significance that the term used for inspection of church schools is "denominational inspection", for a number of writers have sought to reject the term. There can be no doubt

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<sup>151</sup> *Op cit.* p. 23.

<sup>152</sup> *Op cit.* p. 26.

<sup>153</sup> Lankshear (1993).



that the logic of ‘denominational’ inspection is that what is to be inspected is an aspect of the Church of England, as one denomination amongst many. Presumably inspection of a Roman Catholic school would focus on different issues. Implicit in this is that the school displays characteristics of its denomination; including, one might suppose, a denominational membership.

Lankshear’s *Governing and Managing Church Schools*<sup>154</sup> accompanied the launch of the National Society’s website for church schools,<sup>155</sup> and was to be used as a complementary resource. It updated a wide range of material following the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. As such it is very information-heavy. However, in his introduction, Lankshear describes a major characteristic of Anglicanism as being “its generous and open commitment to education”<sup>156</sup> and he commented that through its work in churches, schools and colleges it “usually” welcomes children “regardless of their own faith background”. This is a considerable generalisation. It may well be the case that taken overall, particularly including the church colleges, and church-linked organisations such as scouts and guides, as well as the majority of primary schools, that this is true. But if we focus specifically on church secondary schools, the picture is not so clear cut. Indeed, there is much in the book that is either platitudinous or over pious: “...even when children are behaving like devils, they are still within the scope of God’s love...”<sup>157</sup> Lankshear makes assertions which raise questions worthy of further analysis. For example:

A church school is, or should be, the model of a Christian community. That is, a community that places the service of others, in the name of Christ, above all other considerations.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Lankshear (2000).

<sup>155</sup> [www.churchschools.co.uk](http://www.churchschools.co.uk).

<sup>156</sup> Lankshear (2000) p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

Even for this very brief statement diverse questions could be asked: What is the nature of this “Christian community”, of which the school is “the model”? Is it a community of Christians? Could a community be a “model” Christian community without its members being Christian? Is it sufficient that any one group of the following are Christian: governors, senior staff, teaching staff, whole staff, pupils? Is it true that “service to others” is the highest consideration of such a community? Does this mean that the Gospel is merely a social Gospel? Is the love of God being equated to, or even replaced by, love of neighbour?<sup>159</sup> What of the importance of the Christian community engaging in worship, sharing certain beliefs, behaving in a particular way?

Once again there is confusion between membership of the community, and the activity (service) of the community. This confusion is exemplified by the application of his thinking to the specific matter of admissions:

If every child is within the scope of the love of God, how can a church school become involved in selecting which children it will serve?<sup>160</sup>

Some might see this as an incredibly naïve question, and coming (as it does) from the CE’s National Schools’ Officer it is perhaps worrying, as any oversubscribed school has to select pupils.

Lankshear also contributed a brief article to the National Society’s web-site magazine entitled *What about Church schools?*<sup>161</sup> Here he focused on the idea of church schools providing “Christian witness”. This they do, he claimed, “by the quality of the service that they provide to the community, and by the way in which they make their motivation for this clear.” We have already examined Astley’s idea of implicit mission explicated by a theology of service, and what Lankshear proposes here is a fairly straightforward

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<sup>159</sup> Luke 10: 27.

<sup>160</sup> Lankshear (2000) p. 9.

<sup>161</sup> (2000) [www.churchschools.co.uk/magazine](http://www.churchschools.co.uk/magazine).



representation of that. However, in Lankshear's article the notion is hardly explored at all. Indeed, left by itself, one might draw equally valid conclusions about the contribution of a political ideology to service in the community. There is nothing particularly distinctive about providing a service, nor in having a specific motivation for doing so. This is demonstrated by the somewhat trite comment: "it is important that they are good schools, and that no one can be in any doubt that they are church schools." Their quality is to be judged on such aspects as their worship and RE (all schools have to provide these, and one would hope that they too would seek to do so well), and on the quality of their relationships, which should be "founded on the teaching of the Gospels". Whatever Lankshear meant by this, there are many non-church schools which would both aspire to and attain such values. So it seems clear enough that Lankshear is not saying that the only good schools are church schools, but he does seem to be suggesting that one reason why people will recognise church schools is by the fact that they are good schools. But there are many good schools which are not church schools! Church schools will have some way of signalling their Christian ethos, but if that means no more than the placing of a few crosses, then it would seem to be worth little.

Kay and Francis' *Drift from the Churches*<sup>162</sup> was based on research into the 'attitude towards Christianity during childhood and adolescence'. It was inevitable, due to the fact that church schools have large numbers, possibly the majority, of young people who are, or who have been, church-goers, that a chapter is devoted to a study of the influence of school on young people's religious attitudes. The findings are fascinating:

[The studies] confirm that church primary schools within the state-maintained sector, exert a positive influence on their pupils' attitude towards Christianity, even after taking into account the influence of home and church.....The major puzzle, and point of controversy....is the finding that Church of England [secondary] schools either make no contribution to their pupils' attitude toward Christianity, or make a negative contribution. [Further studies] conducted among Roman Catholic secondary schools

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<sup>162</sup> Kay & Francis (1996).



draw particular attention to the way in which these schools make a significant positive contribution to the development of a positive attitude towards Christianity among practising Catholic pupils, but may be serving less well pupils from lapsed Catholic backgrounds, or pupils from practising Christian backgrounds of other denominations.<sup>163</sup>

The research suggested two further factors: firstly, that even community schools seem to develop more positive attitudes to Christianity than some CE schools (actually primary schools in this survey<sup>164</sup>); secondly that a multi-Faith RE course, as opposed to one which focuses mainly or wholly, on Christianity<sup>165</sup> contributes to the development of less positive attitudes towards Christianity.

The different approaches of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England to their schools is explicitly recognised by the researchers who comment that their findings are “not necessarily a criticism of the success of Church of England voluntary aided schools”; in fact they make it clear that their study is of a relatively small number of schools. They do, however, believe that a theological question needs answering. How can the Church of England accept a situation in which their operating schools actually leads “to less favourable pupil attitudes towards Christianity than county schools”?<sup>166</sup> Perhaps the Church of England might find itself more popular if it closed its schools down! Certainly, “to the outsider it may seem somewhat puzzling that a denomination would wish to finance an education system which actively undermines its *raison d’être*”.<sup>167</sup>

The research contrasted the attitudes of practising Catholics with that of Christian youngsters of other denominations, and compared the latter with lapsed Catholics. While RC admissions policies are not under investigation here, it may be generally stated that the main criterion of many is evidence of baptism rather than practice. Baptism is the main

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5 – 6.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* p. 51.

<sup>165</sup> Whether or not the approach is confessional – a significant issue – is not examined.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 51.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.

mark of ecclesial identity for a Catholic. That means that the pupil intake of most RC schools will consist of both practising and lapsed Catholics, linked by Catholic identity. As the evidence of this study will demonstrate, the most common type of admissions policy to be found in the CE secondary sector is one based primarily on church attendance. This may or may not also offer priority to Anglicans, but the link here is practice. This means that there appears to be some disparity not necessarily between RC and CE schools as 'deliverers' of education, but between those who receive it. There is something that 'works' for practising Catholic children that does not 'work' for non-practising Catholics, nor for both practising and non-practising children of other Christian denominations; it is even suggested that (presumably, but not necessarily) non-practising children in community schools develop more positive attitudes than their practising counterparts in CE schools.

Kay and Francis offer one clue: the provision of RE. It is likely to be the case that Religious Education in RC schools is significantly more confessional, both in content and intent, than that in CE schools. This is due to a number of factors: the CE takes a less literally dogmatic view of religious education than the RC church; the RC rationale: "every Catholic child from a Catholic home, taught by Catholic teachers in a Catholic school";<sup>168</sup> and most, if not all RC RE teachers will have the RC teachers' certificate. Although there is an equivalent in the CE it is not yet widely used, nor is it required for employment purposes. Even then, the official CE approach to RE is significantly more liberal (if not more educational and less confessional) than that of the RC church. RE in many CE schools will not always be a great deal different in content (multi-Faith) and intent (to provide a broad, non-confessional religious education) than that in Community Schools (which follow an LEA Agreed Syllabus). If it is the case that multi-Faith RE leads to more

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<sup>168</sup> Quoted *ibid.* p. 48, but from Pope Pius XI's encyclical letter of 1929 '*Divini Illius Magistri*'.



negative attitudes towards Christianity, then that would provide one explanation of the apparent disparity noted in this research between RC and CE secondary schools.

Certainly the research did show that, specifically in the secondary sector, the syllabus followed did make a difference,<sup>169</sup> but it suggested that also of significance was the way RE was actually taught. Research had been carried out across denominational and non-denominational schools which showed pupils formed less positive religious attitudes where 'open' class discussion was curtailed. In view of the other findings reported, it may be implied that greater opportunity for discussion is found in non-denominational schools. One could imagine an approach to RE which sees it more in terms of catechetical instruction (often apparent in RC schools) as being less amenable to open discussion, but it would certainly not fit in with what has been suggested to be a more 'liberal' approach to RE in CE schools.

There is a further possibility, although one which would be difficult to test. It may be that the very act of attending church as a child (not necessarily specifically in order to be admitted to a CE school, but in many such schools it is a necessary condition for admission) itself actually leads to the development of negative attitudes towards the church! Children who have not been 'made' to go to church, might be less cynical about, and more sympathetic towards, Christianity; perhaps all the churches have succeeded in doing is 'turning them off'.

A review of the results of the first round of secondary inspections was encapsulated in *Secondary School Inspections*,<sup>170</sup> where again the term 'denominational inspection' is used throughout. Among the key issues identified for CE VA secondary schools, Brown points to the importance of Christian principles undergirding everything that the school does. He

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>170</sup> Brown AS (1997).



quotes from a critical report which claimed that “students are reticent to let teachers know that they are being baptised or confirmed”.<sup>171</sup> The implication is clear: church schools should wear their Christian beliefs and values on their sleeves. The Christian ethos must be explicit. Yet, he notes,

Anglican secondary schools are very different. They serve different sorts of communities and they have to carry out their educational tasks in different social environments.<sup>172</sup>

He does not explore this any further. Is it more difficult for some schools to show their Christian distinctiveness, because of the context in which they work? The only comments Brown has to make on admissions policies is that “there is some evidence that not all schools are currently achieving the desired levels of clarity and consistency”.<sup>173</sup> But what kind of consistency does he mean?

A work of great significance for the sociological aspects of this study, although not specifically about education, briefly addresses some of the relevant issues for church schools,<sup>174</sup> as does a small section of one of the author’s later books.<sup>175</sup> It needs to be said that Davie is a better sociologist than she is a commentator on educational matters. For example, she is inaccurate in her description of the funding arrangements for grant maintained schools (additional funding was not a ‘carrot’ offered to VA schools by the 1992 Education Act,<sup>176</sup> as it had been part of the system since 1988) and she makes clearly biased assumptions about GM policy being about schools wanting to “advantage themselves at the expense of others”.<sup>177</sup> That may be her view, as it was of those who disapproved of that particular policy; but it is a view that many would refute. Whatever, it

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>174</sup> Davie (1994).

<sup>175</sup> Davie (2000) pp. 84 – 87.

<sup>176</sup> Davie (1994) p. 129.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

is not the matter of 'fact' as she presents it. Indeed, this section of her book (unlike the rest, which is meticulously researched) tends to make assumptions without any attempt to justify them.

Davie makes one brief reference to admissions policies, to their perceived unfairness, but she gives no indication of what criteria ought to be used to judge fairness, or indeed, how fairness enters into a debate where admissions policies are used to establish a particular kind of school community. Does the question of fairness relate to the ability of VA schools to choose their own admissions policies (where other schools do not), or does it apply to the policy itself? Davie contrasts CE and RC schools, noting that the latter assume that "most staff and most pupils would be Catholics and would be looked after as such". However, she continues to term all voluntary schools 'denominational schools',<sup>178</sup> thus implying that the CE is no different in this respect from the Roman Catholic Church, and so raising the question why the role of their schools should be understood differently. However, she judges that "Catholic schools have kept a much closer link with their church".<sup>179</sup> It is difficult to know what is meant by this; if it means that CE schools are somehow 'less connected' with their local churches (or indeed, their national church) simply because they do not all place such an emphasis on admitting pupils on faith criteria, then it is difficult to see how such a view could be upheld. There are many CE primary schools which are *the* local school, and take all-comers, but which still have very strong connections with their local church.

Such inaccuracies and unjustified statements abound. She is quite sure ("undoubtedly") that there are families "who attend their local churches for an appropriate period of their lives *purely to gain access* to a church school..."<sup>180</sup> Elsewhere,<sup>181</sup> although she asks the

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<sup>178</sup> Davie (2000) p. 85.

<sup>179</sup> Davie (1994) p. 129.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130, my italics.



key, question: “Should entry be limited to the church-going constituency or should it be extended as far as possible into the population?”, she does not offer an answer, but simply reports that “different schools come to different conclusions”. However, she claims to have discovered a paradox:

....families with children of the appropriate age become church-goers, at least temporarily, in order to acquire the necessary accreditation for entry into the denominational school of their choice. They do not, for the most part, do this for religious reasons....In order to achieve [their] goals the ‘religious dimension’ of such schools is tolerated by a section of the population otherwise unattracted by religion.<sup>182</sup>

Again Davie keeps her evidence to herself; one suspects that she is relying more on anecdote than on analysis of empirical evidence. She may be right about some parents, but how many? Vast numbers which would be statistically significant, or just a very small, and presumably cynical and relatively unprincipled, minority? Where is the recognition that people go to church for a variety of reasons? She concludes that parents do not choose church schools “for religious reasons at all”. In fact, parents choose particular schools for a variety of reasons, and in view of the fact that she points out how religiously non-practising parents still seem to want RE and worship for their children,<sup>183</sup> it is difficult to understand how a religious motive can be so quickly dismissed, particularly when she claims that parents of other Faiths choose church schools because they are places “where the spiritual dimension of life is taken seriously and where faith is nurtured...”<sup>184</sup> Are only Christians hypocrites? Altogether this is a disappointing contribution to the debate in an otherwise insightful book. The conclusion she (perhaps inevitably) reaches is that “there is a strong argument, at least in terms of logic, in favour of the abolition of church schools altogether...”<sup>185</sup>, but failing that (recognising the political dangers in attempting to do any

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<sup>181</sup> Platten et al (eds) (1997) pp. 92 – 117.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* p. 109.

<sup>183</sup> Davie (1994) p. 135.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131.

<sup>185</sup> Davie (2000) p. 86.



such thing), other religious groups ought also to have the opportunity of running their 'denominational' schools.

*A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>186</sup> subtitled 'The Church of England Today and Tomorrow: An Agenda for the Future,' included an essay by Leslie Francis on *Education and Schooling*.<sup>187</sup> Much of Francis' article is descriptive of the history and current situation of CE schools. He makes a point which might be usefully heeded by CE civil servants today:

The clarity with which the Church of England perceived its role in education and schooling during the latter part of the twentieth century is best assessed not by reviewing the public statements of the Board of Education but by listening to the perceptions of the wider church.<sup>188</sup>

However, the "wider church" which Francis appeared to have in mind was still the church of civil servants, rather than parents, who send their children to church schools.

Francis points to three "challenges" for church schools, two of which are particularly pertinent. Firstly the "implications of denominational schooling for social integration within a multi-cultural society".<sup>189</sup> Referring to the Swann Report's reservations about "'separate' provision of any kind", he simply states that there is a "new sharpness and immediacy to the debate about the future of church schools within a multi-cultural society".<sup>190</sup> Another challenge is "the implications of denominational schooling for equality of educational opportunity". If one religious group is allowed to have their own schools, then others too should have that privilege. Referring to Waddington's 10 characteristics of church schools, Francis argues that

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<sup>186</sup> Hannaford (ed) (1998).

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 201 – 239.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* p. 202.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216.

....when pressed, these characteristics indicate a renewed commitment to the religious distinctiveness of church schools which goes beyond the aims of service to engage with the aim of nurture and formation.<sup>191</sup>

In other words, he draws the conclusion ignored by Waddington.

Francis expertly defines the main issues by pointing to a set of clear alternatives, and in so doing provided an agenda. The church school debate is inextricably tied to the church's "perception of its relationship with wider society":

If the Church of England is placed within a society which is fundamentally based on Christian principles and if these principles permeate the value structure of state maintained schools, then its attitude toward involvement with schools will be quite different from what would be the case if it were located within a society which is fundamentally post-Christian and where the structure of state maintained schools is not founded on Christian principles. In one case the Church of England might want to offer a radically distinctive alternative network of schools for parents who explicitly wish their children to be educated in a Christian environment<sup>192</sup>

Francis does not say which situation he believes to exist, but one indicator points to the post-Christian direction: the way that large numbers of secondary schools simply ignore the legal requirement for a daily act of worship, arguing (correctly in my view) that worship has no place in a secular school. That would support the 'domestic/nurture' model, where worship is appropriate.

Francis also draws specific attention to ecumenism: is the fundamental distinction between Christian denominations or between Christianity and secularism? If the latter, then church schools should take the possibilities provided by ecumenism. He also addresses the broader Faith issue: is it better to use the 'general/service' focus to encourage cultural assimilation, or to use the 'domestic/nurture' focus to promote religious identity within a secular society?

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* p. 232.



In 1998 the National Society published a booklet containing three essays.<sup>193</sup> The essayists were such - the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the then new General Secretary of the General Synod Board of Education (Duncan's successor) - that it seems reasonable to see the essays as reflecting Church of England policy. The essays had differing provenances: those by the archbishops were originally speeches, given in June 1998 (Carey) to CE Primary Heads and in June 1997 (Hope) to CE Secondary Heads, while the essay by Hall was specially written. In a preface Alan Brown, then the church's national RE (Schools) Officer, made a bold statement:

Church schools are, in one sense, guardians of the faith, not coercive or aggressive; rather they represent the interface of the church and society.....<sup>194</sup>

This may seem to be a remarkable claim, as the church prepared to enter the 21st Century, for that which in the past has been fully the responsibility of parishes, was now being placed on schools. This was to anticipate the thrust of the Dearing Report.

Carey's remarks were addressed to the primary school context which, in view of the general practice of CE primary schools to take children simply from their locality (although that is not the only model, and a more selective model is developing in the sector), it is not surprising to see the 'gathered church' ecclesiology soundly (and somewhat trivially) rejected.<sup>195</sup> It was the Archbishop of York who had the specific task of addressing the secondary issues. However, apart from reflecting on the fact that some church secondary schools do admit pupils of other Faiths<sup>196</sup> the Archbishop had little or nothing to say about admissions policies. It may be that, in a celebratory speech, he did not want to become drawn into a difficult debate. However, his remarks had certain implications: he argued for the centrality of worship and prayer in the church school

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<sup>193</sup> Carey G Hope D & Hall J (1998).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* p. vii.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 17-18.



community which he described as part of the Body of Christ;<sup>197</sup> indeed, he expressed surprise when, visiting a church secondary school, he was told that pupils might not know the Lord's Prayer.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore, he argued for schools to take seriously the need for explicit Christian symbols "perhaps even in each classroom".<sup>199</sup> What, then, of the kind of school community that is not a 'holy huddle', but is an interface with a post-Christian world?

It was left to Canon John Hall to set out a vision for the 21st Century in an essay: *The Church in education: where do we go from here?* Because Hall was to become such a significant player in the development of the debate, his views deserve particularly careful consideration. Hall confessed that when he began his teaching career in 1971 he was "by no means convinced that church schools were necessary".<sup>200</sup> Now his answer to the question 'What are church schools for?' is bound to be different ("from the one given by Archbishop Temple in 1944 or by Bishop Ian Ramsey in 1970").<sup>201</sup> In those days it could be assumed that England was "broadly a Christian country", and so church schools had a role that was much more closely related to society. Hall pointed to a "justification for distinctive church schools" as "satisfying the church's domestic needs", but he still recognised a general function: there are "many parents who would not regard themselves as part of the household of the church, but who do want for their children a recognisably Christian education..." He does not explain why they might.

So for Hall "the purpose of church schools is clear": to provide a high quality education, but one "based on Christian values, enabling pupils to achieve their full God-given potential as human beings for the benefit of God's world", although the nurture of

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43ff.

Christian families is also a priority. This presumably undergirds what Hall calls a “Christian education”, to be delivered via the whole curriculum.<sup>202</sup> As for children of other Faiths and none, they should be offered “such a positive experience of Christ in his Body the church that the faith of the Christian community might be respected and understood by them. By God’s good grace children with no faith background might also find the seeds planted in them growing into a living personal faith”.<sup>203</sup> Yet “ultimately the Christian character of the school will depend on the commitment and the attitudes of the staff”.<sup>204</sup> But what of the pupils?

Significantly, for his position seemed to change quickly, Hall expressed the traditional attitude of the church to its schools: “in practice, of course, church schools properly see themselves in a variety of different ways and have a variety of character and purpose”.<sup>205</sup> Variety not only “in practice”, we note, but “properly”. Indeed, the nurture role is primary: church schools should give preference to the children of Christian families.<sup>206</sup> Yet Hall’s lack of analysis is evident when, having argued for the church school as Christian community, he nevertheless finds that an appropriate place for children of other Faiths, but fails to address the question of how this kind of admissions policy would work, and what effect it would have on the nature of the school.

Hall did seem to recognise the need for some ecclesiological thinking when writing in the *Church Times*, but still provided a less than helpful answer:

The Church of England has no agreed definition of membership. Is it all the baptised, or those on electoral rolls (but then what of children too young for electoral rolls but confirmed and/or communicant?), or those who would say they were C of E? The recent report of the Royal Commission on the reform of the House of Lords has its

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.



own clear answer, reckoning half the people of England as members on the basis of their baptism in the C of E.

Here we return to an ecclesiology based on self-ascription and social baptism, for he concludes:

The simple answer is that Church of England schools exists for the church and for the community. The problem [of oversubscription] would go away if there were enough places to satisfy demand....<sup>207</sup>

But while there are still so few CE secondary schools, when the demands of the church (defined as its practising membership) and the community conflict, who should have first pick, and why? If, as Hall seems to believe, preference should be given to Anglicans, what happens if a school is oversubscribed with Anglicans?

Hall again considers the issue of children of other Faiths attending church schools. He comments:

If, in practice, no Muslim or Hindu pupils are admitted, the charge of racism might well be seen by the local community to stick, even if it is denied by the school.<sup>208</sup>

While he is careful not to claim that a “charge of racism” might be justified, the charge is implicit. What he fails to recognise is that Christianity is itself a world Faith, and has members of many different racial and cultural backgrounds. If such members of the church live in the locality, then they would gain admittance to the school. No church school offers places ‘to white Christians only’.

In providing his own evidence to the Dearing Review Group, explicitly on admissions policies<sup>209</sup> Hall briefly describes current practices, focusing on primary rather than secondary schools. While it might have been hoped that this was an opportunity for the

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<sup>207</sup> Hall ‘The trouble with being choosy’, *Church Times Education Supplement*, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2000, p. 17.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Hall J. *A note on admissions policies* unpublished paper, January 2000.



General Secretary of the Board to provide some incisive insights into and guidance in handling some of the more difficult issues, most questions were left unanswered. He described admissions criteria rather simplistically as being narrow or wide: “the narrowest being, for example, ‘children of families in the parish church congregation’ successively widening out to all those with no qualification other than that their parents have chosen the school”.<sup>210</sup> Referring to trust deeds, Hall claimed that “the oldest trust deeds make it clear that the school exists for the education of the poor of the parish in the principles of the established church”. It is not clear whether this is stated as fact or hypothesis; no evidence is cited. Certainly there is no attempt to consider the relevance of trust deeds designed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or even earlier.

Approaching one of the central questions he begins tentatively:

The Review Group may take the view that all schools should ensure a mix of children of families with a clear Anglican or other Christian commitment and those of other Faiths and those of no particular faith, *where that is possible*.

However, he ends with a recommendation, and a warning:

The simple answer is that Church of England schools exist for church members (the baptised?) and for the wider community. Guidance from the Review to that effect might have to overcome some considerable resistance.<sup>211</sup>

Of special interest are the almost throw-away parenthesis, where it is quite clearly shown that he is not even prepared to offer a definition of membership of the church, and his prediction that a central policy of inclusivism might be opposed.

Speaking to the School Chaplain’s Annual Conference,<sup>212</sup> Hall provided some insight into the basis of his thinking.<sup>213</sup> He recognised that British society may be fairly described as

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<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2, my italics.

<sup>212</sup> Trinity College, Oxford, April 2000.

‘multi-cultural’, ‘multi-faith’, ‘plural’, and ‘post-modern’. Even so, the indigenous ‘white’ majority is still very large, so we are “multi-cultural...up to a point”. He similarly queries the term ‘secular’. He points to 50% of the “population of England....belonging to the Church of England *through baptism*”.<sup>214</sup> When he adds to this the number of members of other Christian denominations he concludes that it is “not unreasonable” to suggest that there are 40 million Christians in England, and that, therefore, it is wrong to speak of a secular society.

Hall widens the religious net further: 75% of the population believe in God, while 85% sometimes pray – to whom the additional 10% pray is a moot point. He concludes: “There is much more religion out there than we sometimes imagine.....faith is remarkably alive and well” Precisely what he means either by ‘religion’ or by ‘faith’ in this context, he does not say, but the implication is clear. For Hall, religious activity in general, and ‘membership’ of the Church of England in particular, are (virtually) all embracing. So the question: ‘is our society a Christian society?’ is answered affirmatively. Historically and structurally the Christian church is well established in English society, and the Church of England specifically established therein. Quoting Farrer’s view that “most Christians [have been] bad Christians....but they were not anything else”, he concluded: “Perhaps the church has always been thought to be in decline.” In other words, the country is no less Christian than it has ever been. Most Christians have been fairly lax in their faith; but that faith is nonetheless real.

He identifies himself with T S Eliot’s view that “in a Christian society education must be religious; that is directed by a Christian philosophy of life”. In fact “the vast bulk of the population need not be sincere or even regularly practising Christians, provided that there

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<sup>213</sup> In ‘*Encyclical*’ the Newsletter of the School Chaplains’ Conference (LXXVI Pentecost 2000, no pagination); limited distribution.

<sup>214</sup> My italics.



were a sufficient group within society to model the Christian community and to leaven the lump.....Perhaps potential is all". That provides the foundation for his rationale for church schools, although for the rationale itself there is no place in this talk. He addresses three issues which he argues are crucial for CE schools: Christian staff ('He who does not gather with me scatters'), Christian values underlying and permeating the curriculum, and quality school worship. But we are left with basic questions if not unanswered, at least unargued. Hall again refers to the trust deeds of schools founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century "in union with the National Society" as aiming to "educate the poor of the parish in the principles of the established church". That, he declared in the Millennium year, "remains their purpose". So, we are presumably to understand that the rationale for church schools, even large secondary schools, is (i) parish centred (ii) focused on "the poor" and (iii) to educate children in the (undefined) 'principles of the Church of England'.

On the National Society's web-site,<sup>215</sup> under the sub-heading 'The centre of the church's mission', Hall argues that there were two intentions behind the wording of the General Synod's motion: "through the schools originally provided and in many ways sustained by the church, the church reaches families and whole communities it would not otherwise reach"; and "church schools should so clearly reflect the character of the church that the church's mission of service to the nation and to the community – generous and open but with its Gospel heart beating visibly beneath the surface – could be directly fulfilled through the work of church schools." This absence of rigorous argument pervades Hall's writings.<sup>216</sup> The success of his case, such as it is, depends upon accepting his premise that Britain is a Christian society, and (therefore?) that it is reasonable for state-funded schools to undertake the evangelistic work of the church.

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<sup>215</sup> 'Why the Eucharist?', *www.churchschools.co.uk*; magazine feature, August/September 2000.

<sup>216</sup> See further *The Purposes of a Church School*, unpublished paper for the Leicester Diocesan Board of Education, August 2002, and 'Why church schools are important for us all', *Church of England Newspaper* 10/10/2002.



Leslie Francis opened the new Millennium by publishing a paper<sup>217</sup> in the new *International Journal of Education and Religion* referring to the “two fundamentally different rationales”<sup>218</sup> for Anglican involvement in state education, using the traditional ‘Durham’ terminology: ‘domestic’ and ‘general’. However, in a “predominantly Christian, but denominationally divided, society” the domestic function could signal denominational particularity, while the general function would express ecumenical commitment. Furthermore, in a “predominantly multi-faith society” the former “could seem highly offensive” to other Faiths, whilst the latter focus “could signal a welcome alternative to secular values and secularized morality”. But in a “predominantly secular society” any religious involvement in state education would be questioned, and the ‘general’ function would probably not be understood,<sup>219</sup> presumably because no purpose could be seen for it.

From the Durham Report onwards, the church’s approach tended to give more weight to the general rather than to the domestic function, but the balance was now changing.<sup>220</sup> He pointed to the late 1980s and early 1990s as the period where the shift of emphasis really became discernible, and he locates the reason for the shift in the church’s concern (noted above) that its schools should be, in some way distinctive. He actually personalises the debate as between two church officers: the then General Secretary, Geoffrey Duncan (emphasising the ‘service role’ of church schools) and his Deputy, David Lankshear, the latter working on distinctiveness. Francis’ believed that the Lankshear focus was bound to predominate, not least because it was bolstered by the process of denominational inspection where church schools had to demonstrate how they were different from other schools. In the 1998 Synod debate

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<sup>217</sup> ‘The Domestic and General Function of Anglican Schools in England and Wales’, *International Journal of Education and Religion* Vol. 1 (2000), pp. 100 – 121, pub. Brill, Leiden, Holland.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

....the language....reveals a dissatisfaction with the policy recommended by the Durham Report [and] the new role envisaged for church schools.....does not rest content with suppressing the domestic role of church schools.<sup>221</sup>

He identified five “key issues” to be considered in any re-evaluation of the domestic role: the religious identity of those whom church schools are intended to serve (the ‘who’ question); the relationship between mission and nurture; the appropriateness of the historic distribution of church schools; potential for ecumenical collaboration; the implications of all this for an Anglican presence in higher education.<sup>222</sup>

The first of these is particularly relevant, although his discussion of the “tension” between mission and nurture is useful. Francis argued that there were three views on “Anglican identity”: measuring church attendance (the actual practice of many Anglican secondary, and some primary, schools); believing but not belonging (the Davie thesis); affiliation without practice (the Bibby and Bouma thesis) i.e. people claiming an affiliation which “continues to shape much of their personal identity and values”. But in preferring the third his assertion seems to be based on what people might actually claim rather than whether what they claim would be theologically or ecclesiologically valid.

On the second issue, he considers that “the tension between mission and nurture remains stark”, and that this is due to a lack of any coherent theology of education within the Anglican Church. What is of particular interest is his identification of what goes on in church schools as “missionary activity” which, he declares “may be thoroughly appropriate among families who elect to send their children to a church school [but] highly offensive to families who reject the Christian tradition in general or Anglicanism in particular, but whose neighbourhood school happens....to be a church foundation”.<sup>223</sup> That may be the case, although there is often support for the Anglican ethos amongst families which are not

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115 – 119.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

particularly committed to it. Furthermore the issue hardly arises in Anglican secondary schools, the majority of which are oversubscribed, and do not have unwilling entrants. The point that Francis did not consider was whether what he terms “missionary activity” is anything of the sort. Is not presenting the Gospel to those who claim a faith commitment a form of ministry? Setting aside these two omissions: the failure to ask the ecclesiological question and the failure to argue a secure case for the use of the term ‘mission’, Francis’s essay provided a clear summary of the issues, many of which had consistently been ignored by other writers in the field.

The Final Report of the Church Schools (Dearing) Review Group was published in June 2001. In July 2001, most likely as a direct response to Dearing (although based on the earlier Consultation Report) the British Humanist Association published a pamphlet by the Humanist Philosophers’ Group: *Religious Schools: the case against*.<sup>224</sup> For them church (or any religious/Faith) schools are simply a way in which religious groups seek to increase their power and influence. That may be considered a fair comment, for much is to be found in ‘Dearing’ about using church schools to make the contact with families, through their children. The purpose of the pamphlet is set out clearly:

The idea that creating more religious schools is a benign, just and socially desirable project is deeply flawed, and it is time those flaws were clearly exposed. That is what this pamphlet aims to do.<sup>225</sup>

Does it succeed?

It sets out “philosophical arguments” against religious schools in principle, together with arguments against the state-funding of such schools. The document defines a ‘religious school’ as that which

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<sup>224</sup> BHA (2001).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.



Intentionally encourages its pupils to have particular religious beliefs and which regards such encouragement as a significant part of its mission [and] they attempt to instil particular religious beliefs in their pupils.<sup>226</sup>

The first argument is that religious schools are undesirable simply because religious belief is undesirable. They recognise that the argument depends upon the premise being accepted. They then revive the positivist fallacy that the only knowledge that is worthwhile is that based on sense-evidence. A third argument is based on the notion that it is wrong for the state to promote a particular religion, and that it seems to be doing just that with the majority of religious schools being Christian. It regards its strongest argument as focusing on the integrity of the child (“autonomy and consent”): that is compromised by the child being placed, perhaps against their wishes, into a religious institution (which may then engage in indoctrination).<sup>227</sup> Whilst many would agree that children ought to be encouraged to make up their own minds, their arguments could also be used against parents taking their children to church, or teaching them anything at all to do with values or beliefs. They seem to forget that all families and institutions have certain values and beliefs, and that there is no values-free environment where children may be brought up – even if such a thing were to be considered desirable (for it seems to be based on the mistaken premise that children can develop ‘untainted’ by others’ beliefs and values). Presumably Humanist parents will bring up their children to live by certain values; they may even ‘indoctrinate’ their children into rejecting religious belief and embracing secularism. Much of the argument focuses on RE (which they call “religious instruction”) as “the teaching of religious beliefs as true”.<sup>228</sup> While it is indeed the case that some, such as John Hall, have claimed that this is precisely the function of RE,<sup>229</sup> there are many who would still wish, even in church schools, to provide a critical educational programme of religion. Broadly their argument is this:

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>227</sup> The argument is set out on pp. 10–16.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>229</sup> ‘Teaching RE because it is the truth’, *Church Times* 16/6/00.

....religious schools, even if they do not crudely proselytise or indoctrinate, tend to inhibit the growth of their pupils' autonomy by giving them a one-sided view of the world and by exercising various kinds of pressure. They also often fail to meet the requirements of full information and voluntariness and so their promotion of religious beliefs can justifiably be characterised as a form of indoctrination.<sup>230</sup>

They do briefly consider arguments in favour of religious schools, but reject them. The notion that such schools often produce good results is put down to their serving "better-off areas". While recognising that "religious parents obviously want to pass on to their own offspring values, doctrines, and practices that they regard as of the first importance",<sup>231</sup> they conclude that because parents do not own their children, the child's views may need protecting from their parents' influence. Finally they consider the logic for providing schools for other Faiths – this they are worried about, although finding the argument compelling, because they do not believe that it is the "best way of promoting pluralism and tolerance in a multi-cultural [not 'Faith'] society".<sup>232</sup> Their ideological baggage prevents them from drawing the logical conclusion of their own arguments that parents should be allowed to have schools which reflect the values and beliefs of the home.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2001, the Bishop of Blackburn, then Chairman of the CE Board of Education, delivered the annual lecture of the Hockerill Educational Foundation.<sup>233</sup> Bishop Chesters expressed his personal view succinctly:

If it were left to me I would ensure there was a place in a church high school for any parent who wished their child to attend such a school.<sup>234</sup>

The church provides schools as "part of the church's response to the doctrine of the Incarnation which under girds so much of Anglicanism",<sup>235</sup> and the intention might be either "mission or nurture": the latter being "the spreading of the good news by

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<sup>230</sup> BHA *op cit* p. 23.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>233</sup> Chesters AD (2001).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.



proclamation”, while the former is the “outflow of the love of God in and through our life, word and deed”. This, and his remarks about ‘Durham’, seem to suggest that Chesters favoured the domestic/service role, but he simply repeated the “Dearing recommendation that church schools should be both distinctively Christian and yet inclusive and at the centre of the church’s mission [service] to the nation”. This is an “educational tightrope”. Presumably Chesters associates ‘nurture’ with Christian distinctiveness as he associates mission with service. He called for both, but made no attempt to justify the call, nor did he consider (apart from “tightrope”) whether a school could be both distinctively Christian, yet inclusive? He implies that while an individual school may find that difficult, the solution lies within the system:

*The reality is that for Anglican schools there are different emphases according to local need and circumstances and the church would be unwise (and indeed un-Anglican) to go for one definition or one model for a church school....*<sup>236</sup>

This is a significant statement because at a time when the church seemed to be moving towards the ‘inclusive’ model, the Bishop stated clearly that the church had traditionally affirmed a mixed economy, and that it was right to do so.

So what might the system provide?

Church schools should seek to help nurture in the Christian faith those who come from Christian homes, and offer pupils of other faiths or none a positive experience of being in a Christian community which respects and also seeks to understand them.<sup>237</sup>

This statement identified all the central issues of the debate. Firstly it seems to affirm the nurture role for church schools unequivocally. It then speaks of offering a “positive experience of being in a Christian community...” to other (non-Christian) children, without considering how far a community that includes “pupils of other faiths or none” can be a

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5, my italics.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.



Christian community. Nor does the Bishop suggest a rationale for offering this “positive experience” at all. Is the purpose educational? If not, ought it to be a function of a state-funded school?

The confusion continued. Referring to Francis’ concept of ‘prophecy’, Chesters claimed that church schools must “provide a secure place in which the ‘budding’ prophet may grow”.<sup>238</sup> He did not seem to recognise that the prophetic function is to ‘proclaim the word of the Lord’. Presumably, to do so a prophet must be one who not only believes in God, but who also acts within a religious community. Chesters ignored Francis’ question as to how such Christian distinctiveness may be nurtured in a community of children of ‘all Faiths and none’. He actually argued that such distinctiveness must have “a direct and meaningful link with the worshipping congregation”.<sup>239</sup> How will that link be made by children of other Faiths, or none? The Bishop had no answers to these central questions, except to comment that the

.....‘Distinctiveness’ which faith communities seeking to be inclusive and serve the wider community have is hard to encapsulate in words.....[nevertheless] unless church schools are distinctive in the education they seek to provide they are little use to state or church.<sup>240</sup>

At no time did the Bishop actually answer the question he posed himself – are church schools distinctive or are they divisive (or, presumably, are they both)? He neither demonstrated that distinctiveness brings division with it; nor did he show how an inclusive admissions policy can enable a school to be distinctive. However, he did reject the charge that church schools are divisive. Quoting his own experience, he pointed out that although

Race riots....in various Northern towns were by some, in part, laid at the door of church secondary schools [but] in Bradford the Anglican Church had no such

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

secondary school until this academic year and Burnley is one of the few towns in my diocese with no CE Aided High School.<sup>241</sup>

He also quoted Rowan Williams' contention that

....[W]e need to be aware of the current sensitivity about faith schools within society but say clearly why we believe that they do not intensify prejudice within society.<sup>242</sup>

Despite this, and having stated very clearly that the CE has a mixed economy of schools, and is 'wise and Anglican' to do so, he ultimately argues for one inclusivist model. Political correctness had overcome the will to theologise.

So the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened with continuing confusion within the CE about the purpose of its schools, with little or no attention having been given over the preceding 30 years to the fundamental ecclesiological implications of the question: 'Who are church schools for?' Despite the views of church officials, empirical research shows that the movement in the secondary sector (and to a certain extent in the primary sector as well) has been towards the 'domestic/nurture' model, with most CE secondary schools by 2000 operating an 'Anglican or Christian first' policy. Whether political pressure, both religious and secular, will cause them to rethink their policies remains to be seen.

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<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

## Chapter 5: The Nature and Purpose of Admissions Policies.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that admissions policies, when operational, can have a significant effect on the nature (the ethos and purpose) of a school.

An admissions policy has two elements: *what* the Admissions Authority wants to achieve; *how* they intend to achieve it. All schools must, by law, have an admissions policy,<sup>1</sup> which will describe what criteria are to be applied should that school be oversubscribed. If the school is not oversubscribed, then the policy is effectively irrelevant. Any school with vacant places must<sup>2</sup> accept any child who applies for it. Until the 2002 Education Act the exception to this regulation was the church school. This provision had been made in order to “preserve the character of the school”,<sup>3</sup> and was used mainly, and rarely, by RC schools which refused to ‘dilute’ their Catholic intake. Both the Anglican and Catholic Education Boards encouraged the removal of this provision.

In practice there are three types of admissions policy, all of which, by definition, involve some form of selection. The community (comprehensive) school will tend to allocate places on the basis of either/or or both/and proximity/sibling link; these criteria reflect the aim to serve their neighbourhood. The effect of the ‘good’ school on house prices is well known. A further criterion may be ‘preference’: if parents are asked to express choices in order of preference, then they may have less chance of gaining a place for their child in a school which they do not place as their ‘first choice’. The grammar school<sup>4</sup> will select on academic criteria. The church secondary school will often, although not always, select according to religious criteria. While an undersubscribed school will have little control

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<sup>1</sup> Section 6, *Education Act 1980*; Section 414 *Education Act 1996*.

<sup>2</sup> Section 26, *Education Reform Act 1988*,

<sup>3</sup> Section 6 (6), *Education Reform Act 1988*,

<sup>4</sup> There were still 166 grammar schools in the English state secondary school system in 1999; the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (ss. 104 – 107) and the related Orders and Regulations provided a mechanism for parents to vote on the future of academic selection in their area.



over its pupil intake, the oversubscribed school has considerable power to influence, if not determine, the nature of its own school community. Indeed,

A school's distinctive identity and ethos is largely defined by the values, convictions and beliefs that prevail amongst its members.<sup>5</sup>

Research carried out in the 1970s laid stress on schools as social organisations:

Studies have shown that any relatively self-contained organisation tends to develop its own culture or pattern<sup>6</sup>

There is always a socio/political/cultural context for the institutional delivery of education. Since the 1980s the party political element has diminished considerably, not least due to the increasing numbers of parent governors whose interests are governed more by personal considerations. Other research showed that schools may make a positive difference to their pupils; and that some schools make that difference more effectively than others.<sup>7</sup> Much greater attention was therefore given to what became widely known as the school's 'ethos', always a difficult concept to pin down.<sup>8</sup> For one commentator:

Schools have their own tone, their own vibrations and soul that set them apart and make them unique. This tone or culture or ethos or climate, as it has been variously called, is a result of the way in which individuals in the school interact, how they behave towards each other and their expectations of one another.<sup>9</sup>

For another:

[the best schools] have developed a culture, milieu, environment, atmosphere, a '*cultus corporis*', which in a myriad of ways influences how well children learn.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur, J. (1994) p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Rutter M. et al (1979) p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> Rutter was instrumental in changing perceptions in this country.

<sup>8</sup> The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'ethos' as "the prevalent tone of sentiment of a people or community" and "the genius of an institution or system".

<sup>9</sup> Reid, K. et al. (1987) p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Beare, H. et al (1989) p. 18.

According to the Report of the National Commission on Education<sup>11</sup> the ethos is vital in the success or otherwise of a school:

The NFER researchers found that pupils' positive attitudes towards school and education were associated with a 'positive school ethos'. A school's ethos - its atmosphere or spirit - has a powerful impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning....An ethos which is conducive to good morale and high expectations amongst teachers as well as pupils is not a matter of accident, but a product of good management at every level....School ethos is such an important aspect of the quality of a school that it merits evaluation alongside more easily measurable outcomes, such as examination results.<sup>12</sup>

While the ethos is elusive, "it can be sniffed out by anyone who knows how to ask the right questions."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is often claimed by visitors to schools that they can almost 'sniff' the school ethos: "When we walk into schools, and more so when we live and have our history in them as pupils and teachers, we can feel the differences".<sup>14</sup>

Schools have become much more aware of, and much more explicit about 'ethos issues', since the new school inspection regime was established by the Education (Schools) Act 1992. This Act established the first formal model (the 'Framework') of inspection for all state schools (the so-called 'Section 9', now 'Section 10' Inspection) to be operated by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) under the leadership, in England, of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of schools. The law also stipulated an additional, though smaller scale, 'Section 13' (now 'Section 23') 'denominational' inspection of voluntary schools, where the trust deeds specify that religious education should be provided in accordance with the tenets of a particular Faith, with the Inspector appointed by the Governing Body of a VA school, or the Foundation Governors of a VC school. The Section 23 Inspector must report on religious education, on the acts of worship, and on the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils.

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<sup>11</sup> *'Learning to Succeed'*, Heinemann Ltd, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> Hinton, M. (1979) p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Reid (1987) p. 3.



Unlike the requirements for Section 10 inspections, where Inspectors have to be trained and registered, anyone may, in theory, take on a Section 23 inspection. However, the National Society, together with many Dioceses, have established training schemes and registration processes. The National Society published its first *Inspection Handbook* to support Section 13 (23) Inspectors, in May 1995. Due to changes in the law it has undergone a couple of revisions. This document is perhaps nearest a formal expression of the Church of England's understanding of the nature and ethos of its schools.<sup>15</sup> It claims that distinctiveness is to be found in the provision of an "alternative world view" which will infuse the whole school. The school will also express the "centrality of the Christian faith...as a fundamental and guiding principle". Who but a practising Christian, it might be asked, would want such a school for their child?

The NCE Report cited above also had things to say about school values, which were seen to be closely related to ethos:

Schools choose what kind of values they will emphasise. They may see their primary objective as ensuring that pupils achieve good results in examinations and that a high proportion goes on to higher education. They may take a wider view, aiming to foster not only enthusiasm for learning, but also confidence and the ability to adapt to change, to develop good relationships with others, or to take responsibility. In our view the important point is that the values which a school promotes should enable all pupils to identify with them and feel a sense of belonging.<sup>16</sup>

Schools will share a broadly common system of moral values: concern for academic achievement, good behaviour, respect for others, and will operate some kind of code which seeks to promote these. Values undergird the school's ethos.

But in society at large there is not only a wide variety of value systems, but also differing notions of morality, some of which may be diametrically opposed to the declared values of a school. It is not the diversity of such systems that is problematic in itself, but where

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<sup>15</sup> Brown A and Lankshear DW (2000) pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Op cit.* p. 154.



systems of value are actually set in opposition to each other. There is often a temptation, in a multi-value society, to try to achieve a common denominator; such efforts seem doomed to promote reductionism. All these matters provide real dilemmas for schools, which are essentially value-based organisations.

Despite the fact, noted by the NFER, that there are steps that can be taken by school leaders to 'manage' a school ethos, it is not, therefore, altogether within the school's own control, for it is bound to be affected by the prevailing ethos of the community served by the school.<sup>17</sup> One of the continuing struggles of many schools is to uphold the ethos it requires against the often contrary values of the community which it serves. So there is often a complex interrelationship between the values of the home and the values of the school. It may be the case that, from the perspective of the child, there is little or no difference between the two values systems. On the other hand there may be a great disparity. In this case children will either rebel against one or the other, or they will live compartmentalised lives, operating in tune with one set of values at home, and another set at school.

Schools which are not oversubscribed and which, therefore, have to take any child who applies, may find themselves under pressure to allow the values of the school to conform to those of the community which they serve, while they seek to impose their own 'foreign' values on their pupils. Children may come from home backgrounds where educational achievement is not valued or even in which (say) property theft is encouraged, only to find at school that they are being taught precisely the opposite: follow rules: work hard, do not steal etc. The difficulties may become even sharper: what is a school to teach in its sex

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<sup>17</sup> See Rutter (1979) p. 56.

education programme, where it is evident that its community does not recognise monogamous relationships as being of any great value?<sup>18</sup>

This raises some very difficult educational and sociological issues: should a school simply reflect the ethos of the community it serves, or should it seek to change it? For Grace Davie the education system is

....a mechanism through which society's values (including religious values) are handed on from one generation to another....an agent of socialisation. Our schools and those who work in them should, it follows, encourage conformity to such shared values or moral codes as society deems appropriate; moral codes which are frequently seen as incomplete without a degree of religious underpinning.<sup>19</sup>

Schools which are oversubscribed, therefore, may use that fact in order to 'select' pupils who will (and, presumably, whose families will) support and uphold the preferred ethos. For example, it would seem to be almost axiomatic that those families which apply to grammar schools, would support an ethos where academic work is highly valued. But what of Church of England schools? Is it inevitable that parents who choose church schools will support Christian beliefs and values?<sup>20</sup> What of Muslim parents who often choose church schools for their children simply because there is a shared concern for spirituality and morality? Clearly, such families will not subscribe to Christian beliefs, but they will often strongly support Christian values, both moral values (pertaining to conduct of life) and spiritual values (e.g. the importance of prayer).

So the ethos of the school is a function of the values it upholds. But the ethos of any school will be to a large extent determined by its pupil intake. If the church school community consists of children (and their families) who are either non-religious (possibly even anti-

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<sup>18</sup> The Education Act 1996 requires schools to have regard to moral considerations and the value of family life; *DfES Circular 5/94*.

<sup>19</sup> Davie (2000) p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> See Shepherd P (1998) pp. 9ff; also Brown A, 'Church of England Schools: Politics, Power and Identity', in the *British Journal of Religious Education*, Volume 25: 2, 2003, pp. 103 – 116.



religious) or who are practising members of another Faith, there will be difficulties in maintaining a genuinely Christian ethos: "At what point does a Christian institution cease to be such?"<sup>21</sup> is a crucial question. Even when one seeks to establish a school community of shared and explicit Christian beliefs, that is by no means easy, although a community of people with some kind of common identity is an enormous advantage in trying to establish a common ethos. Research carried out in the Diocese of London in the early 1990s<sup>22</sup> sought to identify the main reasons why parents chose a Church of England secondary school for their child. It included a very important warning about its data:

There must inevitably be some suspicion that parents' responses were influenced by their perception of the reasons they thought schools would like to hear, especially when the responses were actually part of the selection process.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the findings were remarkably consistent. As one might expect, a variety of reasons were given for parental choice, but being a Christian school was always high, if not always the highest (being a single sex school, in one case, topped the 'poll'). Not all parents who gave 'being a Christian school' as a main reason for their choice were themselves church attenders, but most were.

Yet even families which meet the worship criterion for the admission of the child to school, may not automatically accept what the school identifies as its specifically Christian values. For example, the school may lay emphasis on the imperative to forgive, when the parents have taught the child to 'hit back'. But while not every parent may agree with every aspect of the school's life and conduct, there is, first of all, the acceptance of some kind of common context; then there is the availability of a common language which will enable communication between home and school e.g. if the school wishes to speak of forgiveness and reconciliation in a certain situation, then although a family may not like a

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<sup>21</sup> Hooker, R. & Lamb, C. (1986), p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Kay & Greenough (1994).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.



particular course of action, it is able to recognise 'where the school is coming from'. There may be vigorous debate, but that debate will have recognisable parameters and context which is, to a certain extent, shared.

Secondly, if the values (particularly the moral values) which are arguably intrinsic to Christian faith, such as forgiveness, justice, love for neighbour etc. are not supported, or are even actively opposed, by families whose children attend the school it is again very difficult to see how that community of people can in any meaningful sense, be described as 'Christian'. If, for example, theft and bullying are rife, or violence is part of daily life, perhaps reflecting the community in which the school geographically find itself, then again, the same question must be asked.

In general terms the formation of a particular kind of ethos within a school community is made much more straightforward when that school is able to select its pupils against criteria which secure at least some kind of conformity with the beliefs and values the school (and presumably the church) considers to be important. A 'Christian ethos', (however that might be defined), is much more easily established and maintained when the families from which the children admitted to the school are taken, have themselves made an explicit Christian commitment. The same is true, of course, of the staff who work in the school, and so many church schools actively seek to recruit Christian staff.

Most CE VA secondary schools are oversubscribed, and so their admissions policies are regularly put to the test. Despite recent amendments to the law, as noted above, the Governing Body is still the admissions authority in Aided and Foundation schools, and it might seem obvious that each would use its policy to pursue a particular aim – what they see as the purpose of their school. My own research would suggest that the situation is not so straightforward. Some of those interviewed had a clear idea as to what they wanted their

policy to achieve; but many did not. Some were clearly surprised when asked about the aim of their policy. In many cases (so it would seem) policies have been driven more by circumstances, rather than being the result of principles (theological or otherwise), which have been thought through.

So long as it does not contravene any law (e.g. by being racially discriminatory – something of which church schools are sometimes accused), then an admissions policy can be anything that Governors decide:

Admission authorities have a fairly wide discretion to determine their own oversubscription criteria provided these criteria are objective, clear, fair, compatible with admissions and equal opportunities legislation, and have been subject to the consultation the 1998 Act requires.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the criteria are, they must be clearly and accurately described and the process of implementation must, by law, be objective and (so) measurable. It is because it is fundamentally subjective that the DfES has always frowned on the interview (of parent and/or child) as part of the admissions process, and that is probably why the right of church schools to interview has now been removed. An examination with a pass mark is objective, as is a geographical catchment because one can measure the distance from home to school; a family-first policy can be objective because a child is either a sibling of a pupil or is not.

A popular method of processing applications is based on a 'scoring' system, whereby the various admissions' criteria have points allocated. Because in every case the only absolute is the maximum number of pupils the school can admit,<sup>25</sup> there is no particular 'score' which needs to be achieved. Parents often find this difficult to understand, because for many, 'score' implies some kind of 'pass-mark'. What most often happens is that the school will allocate points according to its criteria; they will then place all applicants in

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<sup>24</sup> DfES: *'Code of Practice, School Admissions'*, 1999, 5.1.

<sup>25</sup> Prior to the 2002 Education Act, this was designated the 'standard number'; admissions authorities are able to admit over this number, and may not refuse admission below it.



point-score order, and 'draw the line' when full. This means, of course, that the cut-off point is determined by two annual variables: the number of applicants and the extent to which applicants meet the criteria. It may mean that a child is admitted with a particular points' score one year, but that the following year a child with the same score is not admitted. Of course, similar effects are to be found with geographical catchments and examination 'pass-marks'.

Once schools have offered places, and issued 'rejections', unsuccessful applicants are entitled to appeal against the decision to a panel independent of the school.<sup>26</sup> That panel has rather more flexibility than the school in taking account of special circumstances. Their decisions are binding on both the school and the applicants. One thing is clear: as each year goes by, more and more parents are making use of their right to appeal. This is because parents are becoming more and more aware of the alleged quality differences between schools (through various 'league tables'), and more aware of their legal rights. But how can church school policies be objective? What do they measure?

Some CE schools give preference to (and so in practice, admit) Anglicans only (and here mention should be made of those areas, noted in some of the school visits, where families are deserting the free churches in large numbers, in order to 'become Anglicans' and so gain a place at the local CE secondary school). Others will accept on equal terms children from any Christian Church; some may extend that invitation to children of Faiths other than Christianity. All of these may require some evidence of religious commitment. Yet other CE schools will see themselves serving a particular geographical community - indeed, some of this type may have no children from practising Christian homes on their roll. Other criteria for admission include social/medical issues, although these may be problematic when it comes to objective assessment. More objective - but still with its

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<sup>26</sup> As set out in the DfES *Code of Practice for Appeals*, revised January 2003.



problems – is the sibling factor. On the one hand there may be dilution of the church-related criteria if siblings do not follow the previous family practice of churchgoing; on the other hand there is in-built perpetuation of the status quo.

While there are many differences in detail in CE VA admissions policies, those schools which operate religious criteria will seek somehow to make judgements on the children's and/or their parents' faith commitment, which is most likely to be measured by attendance at church or other place of worship. The more frequent the attendance, it is argued, the greater the commitment. It must be acknowledged that this is a very crude measure; but it is a measure – like distance, or an 11+ result – capable of being enumerated. Parents may complain that 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian', but it may be argued that the history and traditions of the church have always emphasised both the call to worship God and to do so as part of a community:

Because Christians are Christians they will want to worship God; because they belong to the church they will want to worship him corporately....<sup>27</sup>

This view had been strongly supported at the Lambeth Conference in 1930:

We recall our church people and all who own the name of Christ to the privilege and duty which are theirs of expressing their faith and receiving pardon and renewal through joining with the brethren regularly in the public worship of the church and especially in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Communion.<sup>28</sup>

It seems reasonable to expect that a person who claims Christian commitment will attend some kind of public worship, and will do so frequently.<sup>29</sup> However, the application of such a criterion is fraught with difficulties: are the churches to keep registers? what if the parents must work on Sundays? what if illness makes attendance difficult? What if only the

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<sup>27</sup> Minhinnick L 'The Doctrine of the Church' in Browning W R F (1964) p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> *Encyclical Letter*; [1930] quoted in Evans GR & Wright JR (1991) p. 392.

<sup>29</sup> The preamble to the Order for the Baptism of Children in the (no longer authorised) ASB, and the Commission in the recently revised Rite, both emphasise public worship and private prayer as essential for growth in the Christian life. *Alternative Services Book 1980*, SPCK et al, p. 243; *Common Worship: Holy Baptism*, CHP, 1998, pp. 18ff.

child attends? what happens, when length of attendance is a factor, to the genuine newly committed? Most fundamental of all: how can one be sure that people are not attending church just to gain entry to the school?

I undertook some small-scale research in my own school some ten years ago, when over a two year period, parents were surveyed on their church attendance a year after the child had started at the school. The survey was quite unscientific,<sup>30</sup> but the two main findings were (i) a significant minority (between 10 – 20%) had either drastically reduced or actually ended their church going (ii) the vast majority of that group designated themselves as Church of England; virtually 100% Free Church families continued attendance.

It would be easy to designate that minority as hypocrites, but the truth is more complex. It is often the case that family church going is strongest when the child is at primary school: children tend to be more biddable (they may complain, but they do as they are told). Even child-friendly churches find it difficult to maintain the attention of teenagers – younger children are more easily ‘held’ by songs and games; they also have the supportive experience of primary school assemblies (research has shown that most secondary schools do not, despite the law, provide a daily act of worship, and the habits of singing and praying are soon lost). There may be more alternative Sunday morning activities, particularly sports training and matches which pull teenagers (and often their supportive parents) away from church. Related to this is one issue which would benefit from further research: anecdotal evidence gathered during this research has suggested that church secondary schools regularly admit more girls than boys. Is this because girls are more easily persuaded to go to church? Or that there are more alternative Sunday morning activities for boys? Or are girls just more ‘naturally religious’?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Unpublished, but reported to the school governors.

<sup>31</sup> There has been a variety of research projects dealing with aspects of the religious commitment of young people; many of these have suggested that such commitment not only decreases as the child grows older, but



There is another factor: children do grow out of family activities; they would sooner be with their friends. A similar syndrome is experienced by secondary school Parent-Teacher Associations. At primary school, PTAs are well supported by parents; but secondary school children desperate for 'street-cred' often object if their parents want to be involved in their school. Of course, if going out with your parents is less than 'cool', then going to church with them is inconceivable. Of course, many families are brought to worship through the activities of their children (the Dearing Report makes much of this). The child may be in the church choir, or a member of a uniformed organisation or Sunday School. When the child 'leaves' the church, then the parents may see no further purpose in attending themselves. If they have genuinely seen family church attendance as a way of keeping the baptismal promises they took on behalf of their child, then, (particularly it would seem after Confirmation, which has broadly become a graduation ceremony) they now consider that they have 'done their bit'. The end result is to be seen in many churches today: a congregation that has young families, and many old people, but lacks the 'middle-aged'.

But why should the Free Churches have rather more success in keeping their secondary aged children than the Church of England? Perhaps Free Church worship being more flexible may be deemed less 'boring'. Furthermore, in a society where many still consider themselves 'CofE', it may take some additional level of commitment to actively choose something different; having chosen to be a Methodist, it may be that there is a stronger link with the church which will mitigate the effects of adolescence.

What of parents who have attended church simply to gain a school place? They are easy to condemn: they lack principles; they are the middle classes 'who know all the tricks'. In

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that girls' religious attitudes are generally more positive than those of boys; see e.g. Kibble DG et al 'The age of uncertainty: religious belief amongst adolescents', *British Journal of Religious Education* 4 (1981), pp. 31 – 35; Francis LJ & Kay WK *Teenage Religion and Values* Gracewing, Leominster, (1995); Kay WK et al 'Attitude toward Christianity and the transition to formal operational thinking', *BJRE* 19 (1996) pp. 45 – 55.



their support it may be said that if there is no Christian commitment at all, then several years of church going must be a considerable burden to them (not least the loss of a Sunday morning), as well as a demonstration of at least some kind of commitment. It also seems reasonable to question the effectiveness of evangelism if the family, having sat faithfully in the congregation for six or seven years, never attends church again once it has 'achieved' the school place.

But the catchment system is even more easily abused: all a parent has to do is to supply a false address - that of a friend or relative and then once the child starts school they 'move'. Or they purchase a house in the catchment area of their preferred school. Similarly with the 11+ examination, well-to-do families can have their child coached - these tests are eminently passable with appropriate training, even if s/he is not an academic 'high-flier'.

Before considering other problems with religiously based admissions policies, we need to take seriously the fundamental problem caused by the requirement – quite understandable and unobjectionable in itself – for the admissions process to be objective. Objectivity may well be fair, but it is not necessarily just. The fairest admissions policies are those which have no flexibility and so treat everyone equally. Where a policy simply counts church attendance, there may be cases where a family trauma (such as the death of a parent or a child), has led to a break in church attendance. In such a situation, it may be argued, it is the family which is most in need of the place at a church school, which has been denied that place simply because the system is unable to recognise their special circumstances, because to do so would be subjective.

Returning to the implementation of religious criteria: there are many occupations where Sunday work is essential, and what if the family has to visit a sick relative and Sunday is the only day they can? A host of similar examples could be cited. Should parents (or, more

emotively, the child) be 'penalised' (as parents often see it) because their church attendance has gaps? Of course, it may be replied that (i) it will seldom be the case that both parents have to work (but what if it is a single-parent family?) (ii) if someone is really committed to worship, they will find some way of getting to church, such as attending an early or a late service, or ensuring they attend the church wherever they are visiting. Equally, there are responses to all such points; people will always give reasons, or provide excuses (depending on your point of view) as to why they have not attended church 'as much as they would have liked'. The point, however, is this: to take account of why people do not attend church is as difficult as taking account of why they do. It is inevitably a subjective judgement. Who knows whether the parents who do not attend church because they work on a Sunday, would have attended church if they did not? Even if the school asks this kind of question; how can anyone objectively evaluate another's commitment?

Equally when people do attend church, they will do so for a variety of reasons. It is far too simplistic to assume that people go to church simply motivated by the desire to worship. For many, church going may just be a habit. For others, social factors may predominate: it is good to be seen at church; it is where we meet our friends; we like the Vicar (some leave when a new minister arrives); and so on. Psychologists will affirm that there is a whole range of explanations of religious affiliation: religion is a crutch; it is based on fear; it provides spiritual 'insurance' (just in case there is a God). In other words, as a criterion for offering (or refusing) school places, church attendance may seem to be a somewhat dubious measure.

Why should parental church attendance be taken into account, when it is the child who is to attend the school? What if the child attends church, not with the parent, but with (say) the grandparent, and the school refuses to take account of that? Responses include: (i) the school is in partnership with the parents, and it is important that they share the Christian



commitment on which the school ethos is based; (ii) it is easy for parents to 'off-load' their responsibilities onto grandma, especially if she happens to be attending church; (iii) if the school takes account of grandparental church attendance, where is a line to be drawn? What if the child attends church with a neighbour, 'who has been just like a grandma to her'? Again, the objectivity of the system becomes compromised. (iv) Most fundamental is the notion of the Christian family: recognising that a child cannot be expected to have a mature faith, then if the idea of the church school as a Christian community is to have any meaning, that community must be deemed not simply to include the child (who may, after all, have simply attended church because they were told to do so), but the whole family; there are three partners in religious nurture: the school, the Faith community, and the family.

Where 'measuring' church attendance involves giving weight to the number of years attended, one of the greatest difficulties is dealing with a genuine religious commitment (insofar as one can judge) that is fairly recent. It will often be the case that they do not gain enough points for admission. Clergy often point out that such a family, which has only been attending church a short while, has far greater commitment than that family which has been attending for years. But under an objective system, there is little a school can do.

The church school is often accused of divisiveness when it admits church children to the exclusion of others. But 'divisiveness' as the condition of causing division, is dependent on social context. It might be argued that the continuation of separate Protestant and Catholic schools in Northern Ireland will contribute towards continuing social division, but that society was already divided, and that was not caused by schools. It is possible, of course, that joint schools could contribute towards the healing of divisions. Similarly, the divisive nature of schools - white and black - in the American Deep South before segregation is a matter of record. But again, that society was already divided, and schools simply reflected



that division. Any oversubscribed school is divisive in the sense that it divides those who want to attend into those who are successful and those who are not. In this sense one oversubscribed school is as divisive as any other.

Another charge is that church schools are elitist; specifically that they attract middle-class families, and do not experience the problems of 'ordinary' schools. In fact, there are very few truly comprehensive (academically and socially) schools. Most community schools serve a particular socio-economic and cultural catchment. Neither is there a simple correlation between ability and social or economic class. Church school admissions systems may actually be the most open of all: the wealthy can afford the more expensive house in the 'gin and Jag belt', or they can afford the private tutor. Anyone (excepting, presumably, people of other Faiths) can go to church; and it is free. Nevertheless, many church secondary schools do have academically enhanced intakes and, by the nature of an admissions policy which focuses on religious commitment, a greater proportion of families where there is commitment to education, to the school itself, and to good behaviour. Of course, just because children attend church, it does not follow that they are either bright or well behaved. Neither is it the case that all Christian families are functional. Furthermore many church schools, because they are perceived to be particularly caring, receive a significant number of applications of behalf of children with special needs.<sup>32</sup> However, many church schools are mono-cultural, and it would appear that some families are attracted to them for what can only be described as racist reasons.

What of children of Faiths other than Christianity? Their parents are often keen for them to attend church schools because they perceive that they take morality and spirituality more seriously; although there is evidence which suggests that such families would prefer faith

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<sup>32</sup> Under the provisions of Section 32 (5) (b) of the *1996 Education Act*, if a school is named on the Statement of Special Needs of a child, then the school must accept that child whether or not the normal admissions' criteria are met.

schools of their own Faith. Some CE secondary schools explicitly refer to such families in the admissions policies, seeing themselves as communities of faith, rather than as Christian (or Anglican) communities. However, apart from those policies which specifically reserve places for other Faith children, their position in the hierarchy of admissions criteria often means that in practise non-Christians do not gain admission. It is, therefore, noteworthy that the formal guidance given to Section 23 inspectors states:

A church school welcomes those of other faiths and none who, for whatever reason, seek a place or a post. Anglican schools should be open and not narrow minded.<sup>33</sup>

As this research demonstrates, that was not the case in most CE secondary schools pre-‘Dearing’. Indeed, in many such schools, children of other Faiths, or of no Faith commitment at all, are explicitly excluded by the admissions policies. There is obviously some considerable degree of mismatch between the views of those who wrote the Handbook (which has formal CE approval) and Governing Bodies of many church schools. Why, then, are some CE schools less than welcoming to children of other Faiths?

Where the school is oversubscribed, many governing bodies feel that they should give priority to Christian, or Anglican, children. Others see their aim as establishing a Christian community (in the sense of being a community of Christian children). At times of falling rolls, some Roman Catholic Governing Bodies used to take under their standard number, or have designated a maximum percentage of non-Catholic children they would be prepared to take, in order not to ‘dilute’ the Catholic intake. Governors may also feel that the presence of children of other Faiths would compromise the integrity of the Christian worship of the school (or vice versa). Schools which do welcome children of other Faiths, refer to the spiritual richness that such a mixed school community provides. What should not be doubted is that many of the issues associated with children of other Faiths are

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<sup>33</sup> Brown and Lankshear (2000) p. 10.



extremely complex.<sup>34</sup> Some may believe that it is for the social good to mix children of different Faiths and cultures; yet there is also evidence to suggest that schools where there is such a mix are not always harmonious.

So the policy of many CE Governing Bodies has been to “give priority in admission to children from committed Christian (or Anglican) families”. The purpose is to seek to create and sustain a Christian community within the school. There is an issue as to precisely what ‘ingredients’ are essential to produce a school which is a Christian community. Some have argued strongly (as in the case of the 100% Muslim CE school) that it is the governing body and/or the staff of the school that are crucial. That, presumably, is the main reason why church schools seek to appoint committed Christian staff, something that is increasingly difficult to achieve (‘Dearing’ points to the need for the church to take seriously teaching as a Christian vocation, and expresses concern about the potential difficulty in recruiting Christian heads). However, it would seem logical that as the vast majority in any school is the pupils, it is only by recruiting Christian pupils that a Christian community can be formed. It is also deemed to be important that the parents of pupils will be fully and uncompromisingly supportive of the Christian ethos of the school, because it is only with parental support that the school can fulfil its mission.

This type of policy has traditionally been designated as having a ‘domestic/nurture’ focus. Some see it as the church serving itself, and have condemned it as selfish, introspective, and even ‘anti-Gospel’. It will be recalled that the Durham Commission had little time for the ‘domestic’ function and felt that church schools should reach outwards to the ‘general’ community. Those who support it argue that today general education is provided by the State, and so the church no longer has either the need to provide it, nor any reason for so doing. Indeed, if church schools are to exist at all, they must be distinctive not only in what

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<sup>34</sup> E.g. Brown AS (1992).



they offer, but in their *raison d'être*. That purpose is to provide a Christian (or Anglican) context for the delivery of education.

If it be accepted that all institutional education is 'delivered' in a values context, and that context implies certain beliefs, then it would seem reasonable for parents to have an opportunity to select an institution which reflects the values and beliefs of the home. In the English educational system that choice might be broadly between a secular school and a faith school. With faith schooling, the choice could be appropriately narrowed. Would any family actively choose a context which does not reflect, and may run counter to, their values? Further, would anyone without a Christian commitment want education provided by the church? A less principled argument (it might be thought), but obviously still relevant for some, is that if the church is making a financial commitment to its schools, then church members ought to have the right to attend them, and, where they are oversubscribed, to be given priority.

However, it should be noted that the law<sup>35</sup> now places a duty on LEAs to coordinate all state school admissions. This has the potential to create difficulties for church schools when it is implemented for all schools in 2005, for under an LEA-wide (and inter-LEA) system preference could become an overriding criterion and, as such, might effectively negate the church school admissions criteria by placing more weight on what parents want, than the criteria they need to meet. This could ultimately jeopardize the religious character of the school.<sup>36</sup>

Some CE secondaries do espouse the 'general/service' focus. Such schools will open their doors to all-comers, and their admissions policies will be similar to those of community

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<sup>35</sup> 2002 Education Act

<sup>36</sup> For detailed arguments see Shepherd P unpublished papers for the Governors of CanonSlade School throughout 2002-3.

schools, based on a geographical catchment and/or giving priority to siblings. This approach predominates in the primary sector, where the church school is often the only local school. However, this model is found much less in the secondary sector, and where it is found, it is often because the school is the only local school (mainly in rural areas). Those who argue for the 'general' focus base their case on two kinds of argument. Theologically, it is argued that the vocation of the church is to serve others.<sup>37</sup> 'Dearing' placed emphasis on the church (and hence the church school) offering service to the most disadvantaged in society. It is obviously difficult to disagree with the imperative for service, but while it is right to help those in need, there is no-one today who lacks an education. Indeed, the Government ensures that those schools which serve disadvantaged areas are given considerable extra funding. Why, then, should the church, as an institution, feel it needs to provide a general education service when there are many other needs? Is providing schools for the neighbourhood, the best use the church can make of its increasingly limited finances? The second argument is ecclesiological, based on the historic understanding of the Church of England as the church for the nation. To limit its involvement in education only to its practising members is to betray this historic mission and the implications of Establishment. But this is the central issue: is such an ecclesiology defensible?

This research has identified only limited genuine adherence to the 'twin focus' so strongly supported in the literature considered above. However, this model raises issues of which both Waddington and 'Dearing' seem unaware. Some are theoretical: while recognising the rationale for each focus, what rationale combines them? It is not enough to say that because there are arguments for each, there are therefore arguments for the combination. Indeed, it may appear that the arguments for each are mutually incompatible, or even contradictory, and that any attempt to combine them ends with a logical fallacy. Other

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<sup>37</sup> *Mark 10: 45.*

objections are more practical: even if one agrees that there is a separate and convincing rationale for the 'twin focus', will not its internal inconsistencies doom it to failure in practice? How can Christian distinctiveness survive an inclusivist admissions policy? The answer to that question will be informed by research in the field.



## Chapter 6: Researching CE VA Secondary School Admissions Policies.

### Research Rationale and Methodology

The direct purpose of the research in the field was to enquire into the existing state of thinking on CE school admissions policies within actual schools, although as noted, this was inevitably 'pre-Dearing' thinking. The research exercise, while finding its base in the broad discipline of theology, is inevitably related to studies in the social sciences, because its focus is a human activity: the provision of education. As such it has affinity with other kinds of educational research, particularly that which focuses on schools as organisations. While there are those who find no difficulty in using sociological and theological methods together, others are less convinced:

...if modern theology requires the support of sociology, it implies that the discipline of theology on its own is weak...[and] it is a large assumption to suggest that sociology is objective in its method or final in authority.....divine revelation...cannot be subordinated to the axioms and casuistry of modern sociology if we are serious in preserving our Christian faith.<sup>1</sup>

It is axiomatic for this study that the two methods can be satisfactorily combined. From the perspective of the social scientist, we seek to explain what on the surface may appear to be a strange socio-political phenomenon: schools 'sponsored' by religious Faiths, and in particular, the Church of England. What is it doing 'running schools' in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and within state mechanisms? But these questions also have both theological and ecclesiological implications, and it has already been argued that the 'church school debate' has been stunted by a failure to take the latter seriously enough. In order to achieve a theological (and so ecclesiological) rationale for this behaviour, we must map an appropriate path through the broad countryside of social (science) research, into the narrower confines of educational research, to the quite narrow lane of school organisation

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<sup>1</sup> The Revd Dr G E Marrison, commenting on a review of Gill's *Changing Worlds*; *Church Times* Letters, 17/4/03.

research, and within that to the decisions taken by heads and governors about their admissions policies, and what that says about their understanding of the purpose of their school, and implicitly about the nature of the church.

Now after 20 years of headship of two very different CE secondary schools, I have often needed to consider what the existence of such schools says about the nature of the church; indeed, further what our understanding of the nature of the Church of England implies for its schools. I have argued that only limited, and then not particularly high quality thought has been given, both locally and nationally, to the rationale which supports the continuation of church schools, and in that sense, the field is fairly wide open. I further argue that little consideration has been given to what those directly involved in the running of church schools i.e. heads and governors have to 'say', implicitly or explicitly, about their vision for their schools, and that those in the church hierarchy now seek to be promoting a rationale that has more to do with politics than with religion.

It has been hypothesised that it is the admissions policy above all else which will generate particular theological and ecclesiological 'messages', because that policy both reflects and determines the nature and purpose of the school. I have resisted the temptation to digress into any one of a number of fascinating issues arising from consideration of such policies: the main focus has been on their ecclesiological implications.

A secondary hypothesis concerned the kinds of rationale which inform particular admissions policies. I considered it likely that although particular policies have significant theological and ecclesiological implications, these are either unnoticed, or else noted and ignored, by those responsible for formulating them at the school level. At the level of the national church it is argued simply that despite the amount of thinking that has gone into



these issues, they have broadly got it wrong, because they are operating on a faulty ecclesiology.

Research in the social sciences has been classified into a number of study types<sup>2</sup> according to issues arising from research design, where “study types are distinguished with reference to their purpose and intellectual strategy rather than the methods or techniques used.”

Hakim stresses that

....it should be obvious that no one type of study is inherently inferior or superior to others. Each does a particular job and should be selected according to the nature of the issues or questions to be addressed; the extent of existing knowledge and previous research; the resources and time available; and the availability of suitably experienced staff to implement the design.<sup>3</sup>

Of the eight types identified two are particularly relevant: the literature review and qualitative research. The ‘research population’ was easily identified. There are only just over 100 true CE VA Schools in England. Although in practice it turned out to be not a particularly straightforward task, it was possible to gather together copies of the admissions policy for most schools<sup>4</sup>, and to subject them to critical analysis in order to identify particular models. There were inevitably a number of instances of policies being changed, either a slight ‘re-tuning’ or radical reconstruction, during the period of the research. The instances of more radical change were particularly instructive, and allowed specific questions to be addressed as to the reasons for the change. It is, of course, significant that the bulk of the work on this project, including all the field work, was carried out before the publication of the seminal – if flawed – Dearing Report, and it is possible that schools will be misled by its arguments in making premature changes to their policies. It is to be hoped that the arguments of this thesis will, at least, give them grounds to think about the issues in greater depth.

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<sup>2</sup> Hakim C (1987) pp. 8ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Some, despite follow-up letters and telephone calls, failed to provide copies of their policies.



It was the analysis of the policies themselves that enabled the hypotheses to be developed. It would never have been possible, neither was it necessary, to investigate every policy in detail. Many were similar; indeed, a number had been based on certain of the others. If there are examples of good policies in other schools which meet their needs, there is little hesitation in copying them.

After consideration of a number of methodologies,<sup>5</sup> I decided to conduct the research through the medium of the semi-structured interview which would avoid the straitjacket of the so-called 'oral questionnaire', and the total informality of the unstructured 'chat'-type interview. This is a conveniently adaptable technique<sup>6</sup>. In this way researchers seek to gain access to what is 'inside a person's head' thus seeking to discover "what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes and dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)."<sup>7</sup> It also allows enough freedom for the respondents to steer the conversation, and so to bring in matters which the researcher may not have planned for, but which are relevant.

Every effort was made to keep the specific focus as narrow as possible, and so use the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, while maintaining a consistent question base, in order to provide appropriate clarifications and so enable the relevant issues to be fully probed. Indeed, as Wragg notes, this technique

....tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As discussed e.g. Orestein A & Phillips WRF *Understanding Social Research: an Introduction*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1978, p. 216; Benney M & Hughes EC 'Of Sociology and the Interview', in Bulmer M (ed) *Sociological Research Methods: An Introduction*, Macmillan, 1977, p. 233; Adams GR & Schvaneveldt JD, *Understanding Research Methods*, Longman, New York, 1985, p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Wragg calls it "the oldest and yet sometimes the most ill-used research technique in the world", in Bell et al (eds.) (1984) p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> Tuckman B (1972) p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Bell (1984) p. 184.

More specifically it is important to be able to search for 'significant data', by evaluating continuously the interview while it is in progress. Various criteria have been designed to facilitate this.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Schedule**

Of course, the key to eliciting worthwhile data is to be found in the writing of the schedule of questions.<sup>10</sup> They must be clear and understandable so that the answers provide accurate reflections of the respondent's true views on the subject matter; they must be understood in the same way by all respondents; it is preferable that each question focus on a single idea and should be specific; they should not themselves show bias or be so loaded that they drive the respondents towards a particular answer. Furthermore, following Tuckman's advice<sup>11</sup> questions were designed to focus on key issues, while allowing for ad hoc development. Almost inevitably open-ended questions were preferred to closed, despite the difficulties.<sup>12</sup>

The respondents all had advance sight of the main schedule; in this way they were able to prepare themselves somewhat and, hopefully, provide rather more considered answers than if they had sight of the questions only seconds before they were asked. In each case this seems to have made the interview a much more straightforward process, although the possibility that views that might have been less than fully formed, may, as noted above, have been 'firmed up' by the exercise itself, was recognised. Nevertheless, each colleague was able to reflect fully on such views, and in so doing would have been able to clarify their own thoughts in a much more productive way for the purposes of this research.

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen and Manion (1989) p. 260.

<sup>10</sup> The following points are based on Orenstein & Phillips (1978) pp. 216ff.

<sup>11</sup> Tuckman (1972) p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> Orenstein & Phillips (1978) pp. 221 – 222.

The main enemies for the interviewer are bias and dishonesty. While bias can come from an interviewer's 'loaded' questions, it is just as easily promoted by the interviewee, who provides the answers s/he wishes to provide, regardless of the questions. Cohen and Manion point specifically to problems from both perspectives.<sup>13</sup> It cannot be denied that, as Head of a CE school with particular views on these issues, the writer/interviewer was biased. Every step was therefore taken to ensure that this bias did not jeopardise the validity of the interview. A typical danger is to record more fully the answers that are preferred by the interviewer or which fit the thesis better. It is also well known that interviewer characteristics (status, sex, race etc.) can have an effect on the quality of the interview.

In this particular case there have been two potential problems: the interviewer was known personally to most of the respondents (the 'family' of CE secondary school heads is quite close); one way or another that might affect the interview. Secondly, the interviewer was a colleague head, and the issues raised are potentially controversial (clear differences in the admissions policy of the respondent's school and the interviewer's school, might lead the respondent to seek to justify a particular practice) or embarrassing (the respondent may feel that he should be more able than he is to discuss the issues, but may not want to 'confess' that).

The preparation of the schedule (or instrument) proved to be a somewhat drawn-out task, in that the more background study was completed, the more it seemed necessary for the schedule to include a wider range of questions. A first schedule of questions was prepared about a year into the research (January 1999), and pre-tested in one school with the Head and the Chairman of Governors. In the light of that interview the wording of the questions was altered for the purpose of greater clarification. The second schedule was then piloted

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<sup>13</sup> Cohen and Manion (1989) p. 252.



with three secondary school heads (September 1999), each from different parts of the country (but who conveniently met together at a national conference). Once again, the wording of the questions was amended following discussion with them. The judgement was then made that the schedule had been intensively scrutinised with high quality comments informing its final shape, and that it was ready for use in the field. It was planned to devote the calendar year 2000 to this empirical research. However, despite all these efforts, it became apparent after just three sets of interviews that further, rather cosmetic changes, mainly re-arranging the position of certain questions, would be helpful for the smoother flow of the interviews, and the final version is to be found in Appendix A.

The question then to be answered regarded the nature of the target group for in-depth questioning, using the schedule. The selection of an opportunity sample i.e. that thrown up by chance, was considered to be too blunt a tool. Such a sample may not cover the full range of issues. The selection of schools were therefore chosen by ensuring that they represented a range of admissions policies. They are listed in Appendix B. It was considered reasonable to focus on around 30% of the total of schools, apportioning those chosen according to the balance of the four criteria across the total number of schools.

In order to gather precise information, particularly with respect to some of the finer distinctions used, and the aforementioned difficulty in keeping the respondents to the point, each interview was recorded. It is obviously important that responses are noted and understood accurately, and in the inevitable discussion element of an interview it is difficult to take exhaustive notes. However, detailed notes were also taken at each interview.

The completed research is primarily addressed to all those who have anything to do with CE VA Secondary Schools, either in the schools themselves or within the structures of the

church. However, what has been argued about the nature of the Church of England should be of interest to a much wider audience, not least because many of them may feel that the arguments have dis-membered them from that Body!

## **The Interviews**

What follows is a summary of, and commentary upon, the comments of interviewees to the first 5 questions only which deal with the substantive issues; the remainder of the questions provided background material which has been incorporated if relevant. Questions 1 and 2 are closely linked. Answers were elicited to provide historical background for, provenance of and depth to the policy documents. The descriptions of admissions policies have been categorised as follows, using the traditional language: “general”<sup>14</sup>, “domestic”<sup>15</sup> and “twin focus”. The ‘domestic’ category has been subdivided into ‘strong’ or Domestic 1 (Anglicans only), ‘moderate’ or Domestic 2 (Christians only) and ‘weak’ or Domestic 3 (all Faiths).

### **1. Admission Policies with a ‘General’ focus**

Some policies were clearly pragmatic. School B is far from any town, and although the Head wanted to provide for Christian families, he was concerned that if he “banged the Christian drum”, he might alienate the local “pagan” catchment. Yet it was also important that the admissions policy signalled the school’s Christian commitment. Yet the school’s Mission Statement, although claiming that its aims “are in keeping with its Christian Foundation”, is hardly distinctive. So what is the purpose of the church school which functions in a predominantly secular context? Is it sufficient for a ‘Christian school’ to have a Christian foundation; or does it need a Christian population (pupils, or staff, or just Christian governors)? Or is it primarily to do with the delivery of the curriculum, school worship etc.? It is a real issue for the church, because while only a limited number of

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<sup>14</sup> Dearing: ‘service’.

<sup>15</sup> Dearing: ‘nurture’.

church secondary schools are like School B, the majority of church primary schools fit this model.

Head B felt it particularly important to “protect” the Christian foundation of the school; by this, he appeared to mean that unless “Christian signals” were clearly sent to the community, it might actually ‘forget’ that they had a church school. When asked ‘why would that matter?’ no other reasons were offered other than that was what the school was. School B was the only Diocesan secondary school and almost for that reason alone it was considered valuable: the important thing is to have a church school, regardless of what role that school actually played. Nevertheless, so far as Head B was concerned (a view he felt was shared by many clergy), if they were able to move the school into a town, the general role would end. Where there is a choice, distinctiveness is best signalled through a Christian priority admissions policy.

School I’s situation is similar, although at the time of my visit there were three families from outside the official catchment area allegedly seeking a Christian school. However the head wondered whether the children attended entirely for that purpose, citing alternative reasons for their choice. There is “nothing overtly CE” about the school; functionally it is a community school, and any “religiosity is voluntary”. A voluntary Eucharist is held occasionally, and some families withdraw their children from RE and Worship so effectively withdrawing them from the “Christian side” of the school. There is nothing about the school which “after 2000 years of Christianity” you would not find anywhere, and Head I wondered why the church did not simply hand such schools “back to the LEA”. The Head felt out of touch with other church schools, and although personally valued by his bishop and DDE, did not feel that diocesan support (over potential closure) went much beyond encouraging words.



School N had been VA until 1972 when it became VC; it became GM in 1992, and while governors would have liked it to return to the VA category, lack of diocesan financial support “forced” them into the Foundation category. There was nothing in the school prospectus about the CE ‘nature’ of the school, and it had been criticised by OfSTED as lacking “overt expression of Christian values”. Head N felt that the school had Christian values, but they were “not evangelical values”; the emphasis was on the spiritual rather than the religious. In particular he felt that school worship might be much the same as that found (if found at all) in community schools i.e. broadly Christian. He would like to be more ‘up front’ about the church-nature of the school, and Governors “are pleased to keep the CE link”. The admissions policy was virtually the same as it had been when the school was a GM school; there was a church affiliation aspect, but used only by around 5% of the applicants.

It might be judged that these three ‘general’ church schools might just as well not be church schools at all.

## **2. Admissions Policies with a ‘Twin’ focus**

School Q originally served a tough housing estate as a secondary modern. When the LEA reorganised in 1967, the school was surplus to requirements and was sold to the diocese, which wanted a VA school with a clear ‘domestic’ focus to serve local parishes. However, because the school’s reputation was poor, few Anglican parents applied, so that “the Church of England [congregations] was one of the greatest enemies of the school”. A small Anglican presence meant that there was a clear, if imbalanced, twin focus, but due to circumstances rather than intention. As the school became more popular the “Anglican input” has increased as a proportion of the whole, although Head Q described the ‘general’ element of the policy as “crucial, but subsiding”. So the church link has become much more explicit, with the focus explicitly Anglican: ‘Other Christian’ is part of the

‘community’ allocation. Nevertheless there is “positive *de facto* discrimination” in favour of other Christians, with a small number of children of other Faiths being admitted. It was clear that the process was very subjective, and ‘evidence’ provided by parents was not externally verified.

School W was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century “for the poor of the town”. After 1945 it was a boys’ grammar school, with places awarded both on ability and church affiliation, reorganised in the 1970s as a comprehensive with an explicit twin focus. This policy seems to have been imposed by the LEA, rather than being a matter of principle (the Governors’ Foundation appeared to be unaware of its rights), and so initially the ‘domestic’ side was “allowed” only 15% of places. Head W judged that the LEA did not want “a church school which was a grammar school without the 11+”. There was a “bitter debate” over the twin focus, not least because the churches did not seem to be getting much return for their financial contribution. The then Diocesan Director of Education argued strongly for a more ‘upfront’ church presence, including a commitment to appoint Christian teachers, but the governing body as a whole “feared” that the staff of the school object to any attempt to “push” the Anglican nature of the school. A gradual reduction in numbers from the traditional geographical catchment “allowed” the increase in church places to around a third, with more nominal Anglicans gaining community places. Although the Governors interviewed claimed they were happy with this situation, when pressed they indicated interest in increasing Foundation places “if pressure of numbers increased”, and in so doing they would give priority to Anglicans. They claimed, however, not to want to “lose the working class areas of the catchment”, because this “reflects the inclusiveness of the Anglican church”. Not, it would appear, inclusive enough to admit other Christian denominations on equal terms.

School F is the only school in this rural area, and local families expect to attend it. However, it operates a policy which also takes account of faith commitment, but only outside its geographical catchment. Now growing in popularity, its expansion has provided the opportunity of declaring its church nature more strongly through its admissions policy, but Governors intend to maintain the catchment/Christian balance. Similarly school H, previously a special agreement school with a Trust Deed which focused on the local rural area, where the church had taken the initiative simply because a school was needed. Over the years, it began to take its distinctiveness as a church school more seriously (perhaps because local churches were contributing funds), and an admissions policy was developed which divided places between the local community, and those allocated on the basis of church affiliation. Now popular and oversubscribed, the classic dilemma has materialised: the pressure to give a higher proportion of places to children from Christian families. Governor H1 was adamant that “the community side of the policy is set in stone”, not least because a commitment was made to the LEA, and there was no question of “putting the Christian side first”. The solution has been to increase the number of places allocated to Christian families by increasing the overall intake. It also appears to be the case that, for a variety of reasons (including families moving away from the countryside) that there is less pressure on community places. Should increasing overall numbers not have been possible, or should there have been equal pressure on the community places, then it would have been interesting to see how they would have handled the situation. According to the Head they are already “turning away” Christian families, although he wondered whether the local community was either aware or understanding of the problems the school was facing – indeed, whether they knew what the admissions policy actually was. Those living further afield, and who require church ‘credentials’ for entry, are probably more aware; the ‘locals’ see it simply as ‘their school’.



School M is another which strives to maintain a 'twin focus' school in the face of pressure created by its success. However, its development was not due to considered planning by the Diocese, which has engaged in "very little strategic thought" about its schools. Initially, due to some local agreements, the twin focus was arguably weaker on the church side, and governors have worked hard to redress the balance, ensuring also that the multi-Faith nature of the area was taken into consideration. One particular difficulty here was the apparent inability of the LEA to understand the difference between ethnicity and faith. Broadly they wanted to make "a distinctive contribution towards diversity within the city", but it was not altogether clear what kind of balance would achieve that aim. What they were clear about was their unwillingness simply to respond to market forces: "We made a very real attempt to stick to our principles".<sup>16</sup> Their ideal balance would be 75% places church related, and 25% community (particularly the traditional inner city catchment). They felt that a Christian majority was necessary to protect the ethos of the school; it was also necessary to ensure a good social mix: "very often comprehensive schools are not comprehensive because they are simply neighbourhood schools".

School X was founded in the early 1980s as a new inner city CE VA school with a genuine twin focus, although many felt that the church "had taken leave of its senses" setting up a school here! Nevertheless, it has achieved great success, and has maintained its principled policy, where others might have been tempted to develop the domestic focus. Right from the start it was publicly recognised as an Anglican school, but one which welcomed children from all Christian denominations, from World Faiths, and from its local (very deprived) community. This was "Faith in the City at work". In many ways this seems to be the model twin focus school. However, in practice Anglican places have always been undersubscribed (but then "what is an Anglican", asked the Head), not least because of an adjacent LEA with grammar schools, attracting middle class parents. This provides the

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<sup>16</sup> Head M.

“flexibility to serve the community”, but without that release of pressure the school might have had to reflect more on its domestic role. After all, you need a “critical mass of the middle classes” to help the school succeed.

Schools DD and EE make a fascinating study, and are (presently) unique in England offering a twin focus through partnership. They share a Foundation, although each is autonomous. School DD is best described as ‘weak domestic’, while School EE is a twin focus school with greater emphasis on the general/service function. Between them they are able to achieve a reasonably balanced twin focus. DD is the original church school which was invited by the LEA to help turn an ailing community school into a new VA CE school. The schools are around two miles apart. This means for admissions, as the Director of the Foundation pointed out: “we are fishing in the same pool”. Where previously they were unmatched rivals, they now collaborate.

School DD allocates 54% of places to Anglicans, with two further categories: (i) ‘governors’ places’ (20%) for other Christian denominations (including 5 ‘pastoral’ places for families where the church is already involved in providing support) and (ii) so-called ‘Other Faith’ places (26%) which also includes Christians. In theory this could in practice be a ‘weak domestic’ model. The school is not under pressure to increase the number of Anglican places. In the 1980s it admitted Anglicans only, but came under criticism from both church and community as being (variously) isolated/white/segregated/divisive. Their response was to open up the policy as described. Children of other Faiths were admitted “where the family showed understanding of the implications of joining a CE school”.

In allocating places both attendance at worship and distance from the school are taken into account. However, attendance is “not the whole”: they also take account of “contributions to the life, work and witness of the church”. Asked whether this was a somewhat

subjective process, the Director denied it (somewhat unconvincingly) speaking of the school being able to obtaining “a profile in general” which was used for admissions purposes.

The original LEA plan for School EE was to merge it with School DD. Instead the then Head of DD became Acting Head of EE, and from that base established the Foundation partnership. School DD was oversubscribed, and in order to avoid School EE, families were sending their children out of the town. Although the aim was certainly not to create a DD “Mark 2”, it was to increase the availability of school places “where faith was important”. In fact School EE has enabled School DD “to have the pressure relaxed on each category of place”. This demonstrates the potential for the establishment of more CE schools to enable those already existing to be “more generous with their places”. Now both schools are full and oversubscribed which, claims the Director, is the result of people seeing a more realistic chance of succeeding in their application.

School EE’s admissions policy is quite different. Although one third of the places are reserved for practising Anglicans, the remaining two categories accept anyone who lives within certain ecclesiastical parishes, regardless of attendance. The Director described these as “conflicting constituencies”. Additional places are provided for non-Anglicans and the children of families of other Faiths. Asked what turning the school into a church school did for the school, the Director replied that the effect actually lay in the way the admissions policy had changed: previously the school had served a socially very diverse catchment, and although it was actually located in a “posh area”, the local people avoided it, and the only children which attended were from the poorest homes. There was little the LEA, with a catchment area policy, could do about this, but the church dimension has enabled a wider catchment (ecclesiastical parishes rather than LEA boundaries) to be drawn. This has meant that a wider social spread of families has been attracted, not least because of its



association with School DD. However, there is, in School EE's admissions policy, an inbuilt safeguard for the 'nurture' focus (for all Faiths) – "those excluded if every faith category was oversubscribed would be those of no faith".<sup>17</sup>

In school A a policy was developed which simply reflected current practice. As the school was not (in the 1980s) oversubscribed, the policy was irrelevant. However, what was fundamentally a community focus gradually, as the school became more popular, developed more of a church focus. The Head confessed that he and the Diocesan Director were influenced by 'Waddington' and what emerged was a 'twin focus' policy, with a 75% Christian bias. While there has been some consideration given to what would happen if the 75% were oversubscribed, as that had not yet happened, the matter remained undecided. It is significant that the issue was debated at all, for that implies the perceived problem of non-Christians being admitted while Christian families are refused. That may indicate limited commitment to the 'twin focus' *per se*.

The process of change for School G was very much slower, but its history is instructive. Originally established in the 1960s as a CE Aided School, it found itself, due to a financial 'deal' between the Diocesan Authorities and the LEA, without any direct control over its admissions, which were administered by the LEA. Religious affiliation, if any, was irrelevant. Nevertheless, it did what it could to develop Anglican traditions in worship and links with local churches. It was during the 1980s when, due to falling rolls, it was threatened with closure. The Head and Governing Body worked hard to remove the threat, and a part of that process was developing its distinctiveness as a CE school, including an admissions policy that was explicitly developed from 'Waddington': a twin focus which 'reserved' places for Anglicans, other Christians, other World Faiths and the local community – referring to its historical community, the town centre, rather than the leafier

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<sup>17</sup> Clarificatory e-mail from Director of the Foundation, 26/9/01.

suburbs where the school was. At the time, the Head and the Governing Body considered that to be their distinctive Christian mission. Until the 1990s it was never oversubscribed, but the official policy proclaimed the twin focus. During the late 1980s and the 1990s, the school roll began to rise to the point when the admissions policy became meaningful. At that point the Governing Body, with a new Head began to reconsider the aims of the 1980s. One significant change was the definition of the community. Now its 'local' community is literally that: families from the more affluent suburbs surrounding the school. The gradual reduction, prior to complete removal, of the sibling factor is breaking the connection with town centre families. Indeed, the Head argued that because the school was never truly local in the first place, it now has a mandate to gather its families from far and wide. Furthermore the number of places 'reserved' for practising Christian (not just Anglican, but not non-Christian either) has increased. It was pointed out that this latter change is not to be interpreted in any sense as being 'anti-World Faith', rather it recognises the reduction in applications from Muslim families following the establishment of a Muslim secondary school. At the time of interview, however, although church attendance-related criteria were in use, there were still not enough applicants from frequent-attending Christian families to exclude those with a more limited connection with the church. However, it was the Head's hope that the Christian category would become much stronger. What will ultimately happen: will the community places be reduced, or even disappear, as the school adopts the single 'domestic' focus? The matter was causing some considerable debate amongst governors, some of whom ("in a woolly liberal sense"<sup>18</sup>) want to "protect the Asian link". But, both interviewees agreed: the school's "mission is not to everybody". In the past, the school was called a church school, but it was not – in fact, church parents did not want anything to do with it; the LEA treated it virtually as a county school, and LEA Officers expressed puzzlement (despite Waddington) about a church school which did not appear to take many church families. In other words, the Head defined a church school as one which

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<sup>18</sup> Head G.

admits, in the main, the children of church families. Governor G1 commented that the only reason she chose the school was because it was showing signs of being a 'real' church school – "The spiel (at last) had some substance behind it".<sup>19</sup> As the school was increasingly perceived by middle class families to be a "good" school, so it entered the competitive market place. It was in that market place that the 'branding' of the 'product' as 'C of E' became crucial. However, commented Governor G1, it may be that the church aspect of the school is only important once it demonstrates good academic results.

The evolution of School L followed similar lines. Originally a secondary modern, it was reorganised as a comprehensive and developed an admissions policy very much "guided by pragmatism".<sup>20</sup> This involved developing relationships with two very popular CE primary schools (which themselves used church affiliation criteria) as a device ("playing the system") for bringing explicit church criteria into their own policy. Nevertheless, the policy was still fundamentally catchment based; the church criteria are only 'activated' once categories are oversubscribed. Because of the automatic right of entry to the school for pupils of designated primary schools, pupils with no church affiliation will continue to be admitted. It must not be thought that the policy is entirely pragmatic. There are Governors who feel that the balance is exactly right; they also feel that the specific link with CE primary schools provides a sufficient church link, not least because those primary schools are very closely associated with their parish churches. However, other governors have expressed concern about the local decline in church attendance which means that less pupils are being admitted with church affiliation, and hence the Christian ethos of the school is being undermined. The focus is changing "from nurture to mission".<sup>21</sup> In response to this concern there is now much greater emphasis being placed on the school as a Christian school, and so the desirability of stressing, across a wider geographical area,

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<sup>19</sup> Head G.

<sup>20</sup> Head L.

<sup>21</sup> Head L.



worship as a criterion for admission. This may ultimately mean that the school admits local non-church attending families, and more distant church families. This would certainly be the twin purpose in operation, but it is difficult to see the way it is developing as an entirely principled matter. They are making the best of the situation in which they find themselves. One thing is sure, said the Head, it is a real struggle to achieve the twin focus: “at the end of the day, this is a CE school and it is not unfair for the school to require something from the family”. There is an interesting footnote: the domestic focus is officially Anglican, and while families from other Christian denominations are not turned away, the Governors are not prepared to formally write ecumenism into the ‘domestic’ side of the policy. So, as the Head noted, should there be an Anglican revival in the area, then the governors would almost certainly want to extend the numbers of pupils being admitted against church criteria. In this way, the ‘other Christian’ could gradually take over the community places. The ultimate position would be ‘Domestic 2’.

School P has always been a VA school, but has only recently been oversubscribed. During its years of undersubscription, during which it was threatened with closure, it acted pragmatically as a church school with a general focus. However, the school is now growing in popularity, and is marketing its role as a CE school more vigorously. The admissions policy was in the process of change, giving greater emphasis to church attendance. At the time of interview (summer 2000) the outgoing Year 11 had just 6% children from church families, the then current Year 7 had 28%, and the incoming Year 7, 48%. There are now more Christian symbols around the school, and much greater contacts with local churches. The Head acknowledged that, in part at least, the school made use of the “kudos of CE schools”, but looks forward to the time when the CE nature of the school is valued for its own sake.

Nevertheless, although the Governors had not finally decided on the balance between foundation places and others, and the former may end up the larger, they claimed to want to “protect” places for the local community in general, and for children of other Faiths, in particular. The Head offered two reasons: wanting to remain in touch locally, and the second, because “non-churchgoers may not necessarily be worse Christians”. However, where previously the policy referred to “membership” of the church (which could mean ‘church organisations’) it now refers to “regular worship” – a clear tightening up. ‘Other Faiths’ was originally in the ‘foundation’ category, along with CE and other Christian denominations; it has now been placed in the ‘community’ category. There seems to be a definite movement towards the nurture role.

School S (specifically cited in ‘Dearing’) had been a failing comprehensive school, which became a CE VA school in 1994, keeping the same staff and pupils (some of whom wondered what a church school was). The Head’s vision was quoted with obvious approval by Dearing: “The concept was right. A Church of England School, with Christian values was just what was needed in our locality.....above all [the school] is God’s work. His handiwork sustained by the prayers of all his people.”<sup>22</sup> The Head explained that his first priority was a “big push on the church school ethos and Christian symbols”. Although it was still considered vital to have a local focus, they also introduced admission on church criteria (20% of places allocated). Now the number of church applicants is increasing and, although still not large, the school would take steps to protect local applicants if church applicants increased. This is because “the CE is at its best serving the local community”,<sup>23</sup> and because in establishing the school a guarantee was given to the LEA that the school would continue to serve the local community, with its ethnic mix (mainly Sikh). However, the mix was a “tension on paper”, and quotas may need review. This is becoming more of

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<sup>22</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 5.14, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Governor S, a parish priest.

an issue now that the school is oversubscribed: should local people give way to committed church people from a wider area?

Schools C (at the time of interview 'Domestic 1') and U typify the situation where a previously unsuccessful, and therefore undersubscribed, school was 'turned round' by a new head, and where a previously redundant admissions policy then became significant. Is it simply the case that schools which become more successful, and therefore more popular, then use their church focused criteria to safeguard and maintain continued development (on the basis at least that committed Christian families will produce, on the whole, rather more motivated, if not more intelligent, pupils). Or it is rather that an emphasis on the church nature of the school attracts families which then contribute to the success of the school? Furthermore, do these families support the school because it is a church school, or because it is a successful school?

School U is a splendid example of change in action, although it is difficult to determine just how much of the change is principled, and how much pragmatic. It is currently a 'twin focus' school, having been for many years a 'general' school; but there are signs that head and governors aspire to the 'domestic' role. For many years the school, always a CE VA school and the only one in the town, was undersubscribed, although it was then the only secondary school on the less prosperous, yet expanding side of a large town. It simply took anyone from who wanted to come, or who could not get in elsewhere. Several years ago a new and dynamic head was appointed; a committed Baptist. Under his leadership the school is now oversubscribed, and is taking an increasing number of children whose families specifically want a church school. The area of the town is also changing; the building of a marina has meant not only a vast increase in building, but in more expensive housing. Church families which, in the past, would not have dreamed of sending their



children to what they saw as a failing school, are now increasingly interested. How should the school respond?

At the time of interview the school offered 50-50 foundation and community places. The previous, albeit fairly new policy, had been for 60% foundation and 40% community (this, moving from the 'general', seemed to be pointing towards the 'domestic'), but as the foundation places were not then filling up, it was a "tactical" decision to change. The Chairman of Governors was clear that if the number of church applicants continued to increase, they would happily change the policy to meet that demand. The Head affirmed that he would still wish to serve the local community, but one has to wonder whether, should such pressure increase, the governors would not bow to it. Certainly both Head and Chairman were delighted that, at long last, the school was becoming better known and supported by the churches of the town: "it is the success of the school that has caused the clergy to change their views", and "we have sold them a vision of what can be"<sup>24</sup> but the Free Churches were the most supportive. Are these just middle class values? For the Head hard work, good discipline and success are "traditional Christian values".

### **3. Admission Policies with a 'Domestic' focus**

The 'Domestic' focus could be taken to include just two types of admissions policy: that which focuses on Anglicans only, and that which is ecumenical. Clearly, in one sense only the former is truly domestic; nevertheless, in an ecumenical age, schools which adopt a broader policy may be seen to serve a domestic catchment, in the sense that they are still limiting their admissions to Christians. On this basis it would be possible to argue that those schools which admit children of other Faiths, as they still use religious criteria, may also be fulfilling a 'Durham domestic' function. However, account should be taken of the fact that Anglicanism is a branch of Christianity, and so it is probably the case that

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<sup>24</sup> Head U.

describing the admission of children of other Faiths is pushing the use of the term 'domestic' too far. Nevertheless, there are church schools which seek to be communities of faith, and see themselves as serving children of faith, hence the designation 'weak domestic'.

### **3.1 Strong Domestic (Domestic 1): Anglicans only**

School V is historically a 'strong domestic' school. Indeed, following 'race riots' in its town, it came under press criticism as being divisive. It was originally founded as a school for Anglican orphans: these still had to pass a religious test which included reciting the Ten Commandments and an interview. In recent times it has developed into an academically successful comprehensive. In the 1970s there was a church focused admissions policy, with families literally queuing outside, having travelled with their vicar (to sign the forms) in a coach. After a very unsuccessful 'first come first served' policy, a points' scoring system was developed. The school fills up with Anglicans, although in the mid 1980s, the governors briefly considered the 'twin focus' and were addressed by Waddington himself, who agreed that a 'twin focus' policy would not work in this school because the other local church school (School C) was not, at that time, deemed to be a "real church school" and the negative impact on church families would have been "tremendous".<sup>25</sup> The Governors present hastened to say that it was not that they were against opening the school up to non-Anglicans in principle, but that keeping the admissions policy exclusive was a pragmatic necessity. They did not explain why. However, they explained that they were not prepared to develop an ecumenical policy, because that would be against the Trust Deed. Opening up the policy would mean disadvantaging Anglican church goers. Roman Catholics have their own schools; so should other Christian denominations. The Head articulated a fundamental concern: should 'nominal' Anglicans gain admission over genuine Christians of other denominations? The policy has been modified over the years, most notably by

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<sup>25</sup> Governor V1.



introducing a sibling factor, but as noted above, this tends simply to maintain the status quo, as does giving priority to pupils from certain CE primary schools, where families have already had to ‘pass the faith test’. One specific problem (shared by School C) is that a closely neighbouring town has no CE secondary school, and so Anglicans from there apply to these schools, thus adding to the pressure. “Blunkett [then Secretary of State] only likes [church schools] because we are successful”.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.2 Moderate Domestic (Domestic 2): Christian Ecumenical**

School E is an historic church foundation, which over the years has developed an ecumenical admissions policy, despite some complaints that it is the Church of England which provides the money.

School K was established by its “Foundation Parishes” in order to “serve the worshipping community of the Deanery”. There was once another church school in the same town, but that has become (via VC status) a community school. School K, therefore, has had to ‘widen its net’. In intention this school is Domestic 1: governors would quite happily ‘fill up’ with Anglicans, and under its graduated policy, ‘monthly Anglican attendance’ carried more weight than ‘weekly Methodist’. However, the head was concerned about a decline in Anglican numbers due to strong academic competition from other schools, which is not alleviated by the concern of some parents from Christian homes (particularly non-Anglican homes) that they will not gain a place, and therefore they are tempted to place another school as first choice. This led him towards a confessedly pragmatic interest in a more ecumenical policy. Almost as an afterthought he explained that he would like to be able to offer a place to families who “genuinely wanted their children to attend a church school” whether or not they were Christians. If the governors adopted such a policy, they would be moving towards a twin focus model, but the head did not think this was likely, unless for

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<sup>26</sup> Governor V2.



some reason they could not recruit from the churches. An interesting footnote is provided by the building of a large Mormon Temple near the school. The Head commented that although they do take some Mormon children, he would not advocate geographical criteria, for that could mean an influx.

School Z similarly tends towards the 'strong domestic' model, but does admit children of other Christian denominations, although Anglicans gain additional points just for being Anglican. After all, said Head Z, "this is a Diocesan school" (in fact, one of three in a large city). The 'pecking order' is Anglican, other Christianity (except RCs), then RCs. One might (particularly in this city) interpret that as an anti-Catholic bias, but the reason given by the Head was that RCs have their own schools. 15% of places are awarded on academic merit. Apart from the latter provision, the admissions policy "goes back into the mists of time". The school was established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century as one for "the church-going locality". Like many such schools it became a grammar school post- world war 2, with both church and academic criteria for admission, although the emphasis was always primarily domestic.

School FF is my own school. The Governors' policy is to give priority to children from committed Christian families, and the judgement of faith commitment is made on the basis of attendance of parent and child at Sunday worship. During the early 1990s enquiries went back four years, and attendance was measured as weekly, three times a month, fortnightly, monthly, and less. The school also took account of other involvement in the life of the church "which reflects Christian commitment". The school also gave a few sibling points. In 1996 82% of those offered places gained maximum points, and the independent panel heard over 50 appeals. If the points 'score' continued to rise then the governors feared that they would eventually be unable to discriminate between applicants with maximum points. They organised a consultation of all the local clergy (the policy is

ecumenical), the Diocese and current parents. In so doing the governors asked them to consider six major problems and proposed solutions,<sup>27</sup> and as a result changes took the attendance enquiries back (ultimately) to the birth of the child, and even differentiated between the higher levels of church attendance. Despite some calls to discontinue it, the Governors decided to maintain their policy of having no denominational bias.

School R was founded at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with strong links to its parish church. In recent years the admissions policy has been modified several times due to problems arising from links with a particular primary school, which shares the same Foundation. Because a certain priority was given to pupils from the CE primary school, parents were making 'pre-emptive' moves into that primary school in order to achieve a place at the secondary school. The effect is mutual, because the primary school has now given priority to Anglicans, and so has increased the Anglican intake into school R. One change made in the policy in recent years has been to prioritise siblings over pure primary school links, and within this priority the place of other Christian denominations has been enhanced, so "a Methodist sibling will gain entry over the primary school Anglican".<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, unless there is a sibling connection, it is the case that some non-Anglicans will not gain a place. The main criterion for each category is church attendance, presently "balanced" by a clergy reference, on which once again, we see a certain element of subjectivity entering the equation (the process is "complex"). The Governors are clear that the purpose of their policy is to ensure family commitment to the Christian life of the school. Some governors felt the need to "tighten up" on the evidence of church attendance. The Head, on the other hand, felt that, provided the "weight of Christian presence" remained strong, it would not hurt to take some children from the local community. This was not, however, the policy.

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<sup>27</sup> Data published in Issue 1 of *the Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads* September 1996, pp. 12 – 15.

<sup>28</sup> Head R.



Although School CC fits well in this category, it might be described as being somewhat grudging to non-Anglicans, as it offers a very small point advantage to Anglicans. In a grammar school area, it also offers 15% of its places on academic criteria. Head CC justified this on the grounds that it provided an opportunity for “some good Christians who could not go to church for family reasons” (but only those with bright children!). However, beginning its days as an orphanage, it also continues to give additional points to the children of widows and widowers. In fact, for some years it gave additional consideration to single-parent families. Some additional weighting is given to siblings, and children who attend certain CE primary schools. But in general terms the school sees itself as providing an education for the children of committed Christian families: the ‘bottom line’ for admission is weekly church attendance (of both parent and child) for a minimum of three years.

### **3.3 Weak Domestic (Domestic 3): All Faiths**

Head D made no bones about it: his school was founded (in 1815) to provide an education for Anglicans. This might appear to be just another example of the ‘strong domestic’ model. As it happens, because there are not sufficient Anglican applicants to fill the school, children of other Christian denominations are admitted – but it is clear that were there sufficient Anglican applications, Methodists and others would be excluded. As the policy is presently formulated, “less frequent Anglicans would gain admission over frequent attenders at a Free Church”. However, in an ecumenical age, the Head was bothered by this; he also made it clear that he personally would prefer to admit “committed Christians before uncommitted Anglicans”. In practice, however, School D does not presently have the weight of applications that make the implementation of the policy a problem, and there are no real difficulties in discriminating (say) on various aspects of commitment to the church; children of other World Faiths are also admitted. Here, then, we have a situation where the principle and practice do vary considerably, but despite this



the school proclaims its distinctiveness: “We are the only Aided Senior School in the Diocese; we are a Deanery School; and we are here for members of the Church of England”; and, one of the other interviewees noted, it is the CE which pays!

School O is difficult to designate. On paper it is ‘weak domestic’; in practice, due to oversubscription, it is moving through the Domestic continuum. Originally an old Cathedral foundation independent school, it became VA, moved into GMS, and has now returned to the VA category. 50% of its places are reserved for members of the Church of England. The rest of the places are allocated: cathedral choristers, staff children, siblings, other Faiths and other Christian denominations, and finally distance related criteria (they seldom reach this). The school also reserves places which are allocated on the basis of musical or academic excellence.

It will be seen that the ‘domestic’ designation here takes on a rather different focus: children of the staff and siblings, who may not have a church affiliation. However, because (presumably) staff support the Christian ethos of the school and siblings may be related to those who previously took up a church place, then there is certainly an element of domesticity in the arrangements. It is particularly interesting to note that other Christian denominations and other Faiths share a category, where they are considered equally (on which Head O commented: “there are difficulties in comparing Methodist and Moslem references”). However, when there is a high number of staff children and siblings, this category may not be reached.

At first sight School Y might be designated a twin focus school, but in practice it tends towards the ‘weak’ domestic. Around 60% of its places (Foundation places) are reserved for Christian families. According to the prospectus there would appear to be no particular Anglican preference; the key is “length of regular church attendance and commitment”.

However, the practice is not so straightforward, because the Head reported that due to heavy oversubscription, they tended to “fill up” the Foundation places with Anglicans. She then went on to explain that “a life-long Methodist, would gain a place over a monthly attending Anglican”, but it is hard to see how those lines are drawn. At what point would (say) a Methodist gain a place over an Anglican? The so-called ‘open’ places give preference to children of Other Faiths, siblings/family, and attendance at CE primary schools (these latter groups will tend to reinforce the status quo). As the school is competing with other selective schools, 15% of places are awarded on academic ability. All prospective pupils and parents are interviewed to compensate for falsehoods which the school regularly finds on application forms, being asked questions about church and Bible.

School AA (with 15% academic selection) offers places to Anglicans, other Christians, and children of other Faiths; but there is a clear ‘pecking order’. This may be illustrated by the example that a “weekly Methodist is equivalent [for admissions] to a fortnightly Anglican”. In other words, a Methodist has to attend church twice as often as an Anglican, in order to gain a place! The Head further indicated that places for Muslims had been limited “because of problems with assemblies”. It was not explained how this was done objectively, but then this school also has interviews. In practice, therefore, School AA tends towards the Domestic 2 category, although officially being Domestic 3.

By contrast, School BB (in the same city) might be seen to aspire to be a genuine Domestic 3 model, although it also selects 15% on academic ability, and again a hierarchical points system is used which gives priority respectively to Anglican, and then other Christians (although the number of additional points given is a relatively small percentage of the total). The number of applicants from families of Other Faiths is quite small. What if the numbers were larger? They would adjust the points system to compensate. When pushed on the question as to whether an increase in Anglican applicants would lead them to



increase the Anglican percentage of places (there is no laid down quota), then Governors indicated that they probably would respond in that way, although they emphasised that they would not want that to happen. "It is a Christian school that happens to be Anglican". Again it seems fair to say (and the Governors interviewed agreed) that their system verged on the arbitrary and (so) subjective. Governor BB2 preferred the term "organic", which he translated as "flexible". Governor BB1 accepted that they would have problems if they had to justify their system: "you just hope you haven't been unfair". This school also used the interview.

School S is now a good example of 'weak domestic', having moved from Domestic 1. Situated in both a multi-Faith and academically selective area of the country, it has a mixed history. Prior to 1991 it admitted fully against church related criteria. Since then the 11+ examination has attracted families to the grammar schools. Originally seen as an "exclusive community" this has meant broadening out its policy to include other Faith children. However, this is more pragmatic than by design. Now it has happened the Head claimed to be comfortable with it (she has since retired, and Head S, a 'twin focus' enthusiast, has become the new Head; it remains to be seen whether he will promote any changes). Clearly the nature of the balance will be an ongoing issue. The Head noted some pressure to return to the more exclusive policy, but noted that the "local geography" and selection complicate the situation.

#### **4. Other**

It is difficult to know where to place School J in the categories described above. In practice it is 'weak domestic'. However, its admissions policy, and the way it appears to have been implemented over the years, are, to say the least, somewhat opaque. At the time of interview the school had an acting Head (now the Head) who confessed that he knew only



a little about his school's policy (despite being deputy head for many years) and that admissions were 'dealt with' by the governor present.

The policy itself is difficult to 'pin down', and there is a very real question mark as to whether it is ever actually applied in the way it is written. The impression given by a Governor was that she had her own methods of implementing it – quite what those methods were she did not seem too keen to reveal. Subjectivity is built into their system, and one can only wonder at what would happen should a parent complain to the Ombudsman. For example, although the policy seems to be based on church attendance (of the parent, not the child), several times the term 'season' was used – referring to the apparent 'dash to church' a year or so before the admissions process begins. But Governor J felt that if there are "genuine" circumstances why people cannot go to church, "they should not be penalised". She was against any points system ("too clinical"), and therefore any measurements made – whereby one applicant is compared with another – are based on the 'feeling' of this governor as she considers each application (the example given was where parents and vicar disagree on church attendance) "taken as a whole thing" (whatever that means). Objectivity is deemed to be in "the setting of the criteria, not in their implementation". Is priority actually given to Anglicans? That "isn't cut and dried....there is an ecumenical dimension". They could 'fill up' with Anglicans, but they "always take personal circumstances into account". Quite what "personal circumstances" those might be, were not revealed. "It's not easy", explained Governor J, but "anyone is considered". This interview was the most difficult of all, because Governor J began to interpret the questions as criticisms of their policy. It was, in fact, very difficult to find questions that could not be interpreted in that way, for the policy and the way it is implemented is very open to criticism, and probably legal challenge.

### **The meaning ‘signalled’ by admissions policies**

Again, questions 3 and 4 may be usefully taken together, not least (as anticipated) because they seldom elicited much response at all. Indeed, it is quite certain that the questions have hardly ever been considered – and this in itself is significant. It was apparent during many of the interviews that the interviewees (even though they had previously had sight of the questions) had no real idea that what they did in their school might have implications for the church as a whole.

Evidence was often quoted which supported the view that the local community often saw the church school as one “with principles”,<sup>29</sup> even if they did not recognise the explicit religious identity. The public perception often appears to be that the church school emphasises morality because it is a church school: “the public think that we have a different moral and ethical code”.<sup>30</sup> However, a number of Heads acknowledged the importance of sending out the right signals e.g. publicising the school’s charitable works (despite Matthew 6: 14!). There was a common perception that the church school was seen to be particularly caring, because “we take seriously Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness”.<sup>31</sup>

In a number of schools there was an interesting spiritual ‘relationship’ between school and local community. Head B felt that his school stood as a beacon amidst a rural paganism. Schools are not, of course, the only loci of such interactions: the parish church has its engagement with common religion at harvest festivals, Christmas celebrations and the Occasional Offices. Nevertheless, there is a more frequent interaction in schools, particularly where the children do not have much experience of organised religion. Positively, many schools saw this as an opportunity, and claimed there was rarely any tension between the two spiritualities. Rather, it was the role of the school to “tap into” a

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<sup>29</sup> Head A.

<sup>30</sup> Head P.

<sup>31</sup> Head L.

common spirituality and to make explicit connections for the children with the Christian Faith.

Heads and governors of 'twin focus' schools often felt that the signals received by the community were particularly positive ("when they understand the criteria"<sup>32</sup>): they "appreciate the outreach, but understand that they can't all go there".<sup>33</sup> However, there were also some such schools where the question was asked whether the community would recognise it as a church school at all, or whether they ever gave the matter much thought. So far as Head N was concerned, "the 'CE bit' adds, perhaps, a perception of Christian values", but not much more. They can understand the Catholic model, said Head X, but they are confused about what the CE is trying to achieve with its schools. In particular, they are puzzled when they cannot gain a place at the school, whereas they understand why they cannot be admitted to the RC school.

It seemed equally difficult for schools which did not embrace the domestic function wholeheartedly to have their school recognised by the church to be a part of that church. Head G's perception was that many parishes were completely uninterested in what the school was doing, but that interest would increase as the school admitted more practising church members. Links between schools and the Diocese seem to vary considerably. A number of school interviewees felt that they were ignored by the ecclesiastical authorities: the school is "an unacknowledged resource in the Deanery".<sup>34</sup> By contrast Schools Z, AA, and BB (all in the same city) felt they had a clear diocesan identity: "this is a diocesan school". The Head of School P felt that in his twin focus school, the clergy are pleased that "someone is holding the standard for Christian education". Governor W3 felt that the

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<sup>32</sup> Head L.

<sup>33</sup> Director DD/EE.

<sup>34</sup> Governor W3.



existence of church schools provided support in enabling parents to take their baptismal promises seriously.

Where the school operated primarily a 'domestic' service several governors echoed the view of Governor C1, that the signals were "probably negative", or that some would see the school as being exclusive, or even elitist, and not for them. This feeling seemed to be particularly pronounced amongst people who live fairly close to the school, but could not gain a place. Head R thought that the local community "blamed the school rather than the church". Those who did not gain a place became particularly critical when they saw children who did "dropping out of church". Interestingly, Governor C1 defended his school's policy on the basis that it was the same as that of Roman Catholic Schools – "and no-one complains about them not serving the community!". It is "entirely reasonable" for church schools to take "church people". Head D agreed that his policy would send out a "bigoted impression", but that was just the policy; the reality was, in fact, quite different. Yet proclaiming the policy was important, despite the signals, because it was a way of saying that the school was special and distinctive. It was deemed unfortunate if signals of selectivity and exclusiveness were sent out, but such signals are actually important in 'selling' the school. If the Vicar has to sign your application form, that is something different, said a Teacher Governor. It is inevitable, remarked Head L, that "fringers would see that there are hoops to jump through", and some then "accuse the school of hypocrisy". What of the church families themselves? They saw having a church school as a "divine right!"<sup>35</sup>

There were clearly quite different perceptions of the views of the local churches: some felt that their mission to provide education for Christian families was strongly supported, both in theory and in practice by clergy (many church schools appear to be seen as 'havens' for

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<sup>35</sup> Head Z.

the children of the clergy, who may find themselves bullied in other schools). However, there are also clergy who have ambivalent or even negative feelings about church schools with a domestic/nurture focus. Conversely, where the church school was seen to be serving the community, there was support from those who applauded 'urban mission', but complaints from those who asked why the church should not provide schools for its own children. What is clear is that clergy support for church schools cannot be assumed. Others were more 'upbeat' about the whole concept of proclaiming the school's church status: Head K spoke warmly of his school being seen in the community as a "very churchy place....a CE school". He felt that this was actually particularly attractive to non-church members who were after "spiritual and moral inoculation" for their children. After all, he commented, a church school, with its religious ethos, "stands for the development of human beings [and this] strikes a chord with non-religious people".

There was a particular ecumenical problem for some schools. Where (say) a committed Methodist would still not gain entry over an infrequently attending Anglican, there were clearly some negative perceptions amongst other Christian denominations. The emphasis given to the sibling link in some schools, meant that there was also distress felt by Anglicans without a child already in the school, who saw 'their' place taken by a Methodist, just because there was already a child there. As a Baptist, Head U felt that "it is fair to give first priority to members of the Church of England".

It was strongly felt that the link between the church school and the local church or churches, was particularly important, especially in those schools where many of the children had church backgrounds. Schools were appreciative of those clergy that led assemblies. A number of heads and governors spoke also of their appreciation of the provision of a chaplaincy service by local churches. However, there were a significant

number where the schools felt very little support from the clergy, or the church at large. Head G commented that the church was “too apologetic” for its schools.

### **The centre of the church’s mission?**

As to the Synod motion, the vast majority of those interviewed, when asked ‘what actually is the church’s mission to the nation?’, confessed that they would find that very difficult to answer: “a good question!”<sup>36</sup> There was, however, some ecclesiological discussion. For Head T the purpose of the Church of England was “to be there for all” as the established church. For Governor V2 although the Church of England is “on duty on national occasions” the reality is rather different locally. “Christianity (*sic*) is now a sect”.<sup>37</sup> Governor V1 disagreed: the Church of England is an “umbrella – like the NHS” – we are in unless we opt out. Governor W3 felt that the Church of England was increasingly becoming a gathered church – “but not here!”. Head AA was clear that “the CE no longer has a mission to the nation...it just wants to re-invent itself and be trendy and cool”. The Church of England has ‘lost the plot’. While it was generally agreed that the church did, or ought to, have a missionary function, quite what that was, many felt unable to articulate. Head H (a priest of the Church of England) was not at all convinced that even the church itself knew what its mission was (or indeed, what it would mean to be at the centre of that mission).

So did the Synod really know that it was saying? asked Governor S, who went on to express his own understanding of the church’s mission: “to bring people to the knowledge of Christ and salvation” (Head Z: “to share the fundamental truth with people”). The church, however, was not a “social work organisation” and its prime function was to bring people to worship. Service is mission “only in the sense that it influences people’s hearts and minds” towards faithful religious commitment. The parish itself has a central core of

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<sup>36</sup> Head R.

<sup>37</sup> Head V.



committed people, and a “penumbra” who might say: ‘it is my church if only I went to it’. A number of interviewees felt that the church saw itself as a “guardian” of spiritual and moral values, but that it did not guard them particularly well.

This led to some reflection on the nature of a Christian community – is it simply a community of Christians, or something else? The church school may not contain many Christians, but Christianity is not simply an “add-on factor”. When asked directly: ‘is it necessary to have Christian pupils for a church school to be a Christian community?’, Head U responded that it was essential to have “a high proportion”.

Governor S felt that it was not “entirely true” that the church school stood at the centre of the church’s mission, but they could make a useful contribution in the contact made with children, “sharing the eternal truths” with them. After all you “can’t do the Billy Graham thing” if the State is paying. Head Y responded by pointing out that one’s answer depended “on what you mean by the church” (compare Head Z: “the trouble is, I’m not too sure what the church is!”), but also that she did not see her school “working as the church – it’s not for us to do the church’s mission”; rather, the church ought to have a mission to its schools. Head Z agreed: it was not a fundamental purpose of the church to provide schools, and despite the ideal that the church schools (“like the parishes”) should have an open door policy, the church could probably no longer afford to make a general provision. That then left the domestic function. That was fine so long as other groups should also have that right.

Most interviewees, nevertheless, agreed with the Synod statement: the church school is the church at work in the specific field of education, indeed, “the school is an integral part of

the church “<sup>38</sup> and as such it shares the mission of the church (whatever that is). For Head H his school serving its local community, as well as Christian families, was the Church of England in microcosm. This same head, however, doubted whether the General Synod (in passing the motion) really believed it. It was “rhetoric, not reality”, and “pure hyperbole”, however supportive of church schools that might be. His argument was that the Church of England is wedded to its parish system. However, the parishes have failed “and it has now dawned on the church that church schools have a role in mission”;<sup>39</sup> so the church school “must evangelise”.<sup>40</sup> Therefore “the church would do better training Christian teachers than training priests”. For Head G the Synod Resolution was irrelevant when the church locally seemed to have little interest; indeed, the church as a whole really does not take its church schools seriously enough. Perhaps, Head H suggested, it was beginning to do so only now because the parish base was becoming weaker: fewer stipendiary clergy, and smaller congregations. While he values the impetus that the Dearing Review might give to church schools, he felt that this impetus is not genuinely of the whole church, but is being pushed through by church politicians. Head T found the synod resolution affirming, but wished that the Diocese could be more affirming itself. Just as significant was the view, expressed several times, that even the Diocesan Boards of Education did not always have a clear view on the ‘mission’ of church schools. Head P felt that certain diocesan officers did not see their role as working with church schools at all.

Many heads had no difficulty with people’s church going being encouraged by school admissions. Head E cited increasing congregations within his catchment, and decreasing congregations outside of it, and if people go for the wrong reasons? “God can deal with that”.<sup>41</sup> For Deputy Head U: “if we can persuade families to go to church in order to get a place at the school – that is evangelism”. In any case people do tend to go to church for all

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<sup>38</sup> Head O.

<sup>39</sup> Head K.

<sup>40</sup> Head AA.

<sup>41</sup> Head T.

kinds of “incoherent reasons”; Head V and his family “stuck it out” in a very unwelcoming church, so he could be sure that his children would be admitted to the school.

For Head F, in a school where many do not confess a Christian faith, the “Christian dimension” compensates for the absence of children from the churches. If the children do not go to church, then the church comes to the children via the church schools. We are “at the frontiers”.<sup>42</sup> Head X pointed out that in the inner city “where parishes were failing”, the church school was very often the only real point of Christian contact.

Some argued in fact that the mission of the church was likely (particularly in the future) to be carried forward much more effectively by church schools, not least because the schools were in day-to-day contact with far more people than the parish churches. Head CC was even more positive: “the future of the church depends now on our access to young people via our schools,” although the main purpose of the schools is educational. Church schools are “compensating for the failure of the church to touch families”.<sup>43</sup> Most congregations are elderly, and declining. If there were no church schools, the church would lose contact with the young completely. Another approach was articulated by Director EE who commented that church schools with multi-Faith intakes, enabled the church to dialogue with other Faiths.

A number of heads and governors claimed, with a great sense of disappointment, that they felt that ‘the church’, or at least many clergy, did not support their church schools, or may actually be antagonistic towards them. Part of the problem, argued Head E, is that the church as a whole, and its civil servants in particular, have been “too defensive”, and even embarrassed, about its schools in the past, believing them to be elitist institutions. That is why the ‘general’ as opposed to the ‘domestic’ model received approbation in the 70s and

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<sup>42</sup> Teacher F2.

<sup>43</sup> Head Q.



80s. What has changed? He cited a number of issues (confirming Francis' arguments): increasing parental choice, together with increased inter-school competition, have made it necessary for church schools to 'play the distinctiveness card'. However, "to my astonishment and my surprise," Head Z felt that the story of church schools was "a variation on the Parable of the Prodigal Son". Church schools were rejected by the church (he reflected that the family situation of the prodigal son may have been "intolerable", forcing him to leave), but were now (at last) being taken seriously. "it's a cheek" – we, and our pupils, are the worshipping church.

A number of Heads have a very positive view about the role of church schools in the church's mission ("we are very much involved with mission";<sup>44</sup> an "active branch of the Church of England"<sup>45</sup>). But that mission is not simply a mission of service; it is a mission to bring God to people: "preparing our young people for the Kingdom of God".<sup>46</sup> This is done through worship, and the quality of relationships.

But should the mission focus only on its own members? Governor V3 could not understand in what sense a CE school with 100% Muslim intake (this is the case with some primary schools) could be accurately described as a church school. The church school must have an ethos which makes it distinctive within a "non-Christian" society. For Governor R2 the value was in the school acting as a focus "knitting together the Anglican community over a large area". It was also a "haven or sanctuary" for children who might be bullied at other schools because they went to church. It followed, therefore, that direct service to the nation was not the issue; however, indirect service took the form of "sending out Christians into the nation".

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<sup>44</sup> Head F.

<sup>45</sup> Head Q.

<sup>46</sup> Head F.

Virtually every head spoke of the quality of its worship as being fundamental to its work. In ‘domestic’ schools that worship tended to be ‘naturally compulsory’: in other words, bearing in mind the background and experience of the pupils (who have been admitted on the basis of church affiliation) worship is simply something that is ‘done’. In ‘twin focus’ and ‘general’ schools certain worship activities, particularly Eucharists, were voluntary activities, for “to make it compulsory would cause resentment among non-committed families”.<sup>47</sup>

So where the mission was articulated, two main issues were identified. Firstly, “supporting the development of Christian people”;<sup>48</sup> and “nurturing the commitment of the child”.<sup>49</sup> But “do Christian kids need a church school?”<sup>50</sup> Governor J felt that the school was “providing individuals in society with Christian values”, implying that even non-practising pupils would imbibe Christian values. Many emphasised the centrality of worship: this is a “eucharistically based school”.<sup>51</sup> But is there not a fundamental discontinuity between education and nurture? Head AA was particularly interested in this. While it is not the intrinsic mission of the church to provide education, he felt that as it did, it was entirely reasonable for the church to “compensate for the parishes” and provide spiritual nurture, so long as that was not oppressive. Of course, one could not simply assume that because families had attended church that they were positive about Christian nurture – it sometimes appeared from the behaviour of both children and parents, that church-going has hardly Christianised them at all.

Secondly, no-one seemed to be in favour of outright and explicit evangelism, but several felt, particularly in those schools which admitted children from no particular Faith

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<sup>47</sup> Head L.

<sup>48</sup> Head A.

<sup>49</sup> Head J.

<sup>50</sup> Head K.

<sup>51</sup> Head Q.

background, that there was an implicit evangelical job to be done, even if that was simply ‘by example’, by “communicating Christian values”<sup>52</sup> or by “showing non-Christians what the church is about”:<sup>53</sup> church schools are “faith in action”. This is, for Head M, “low level evangelism”, which should not “interfere” with the child’s own faith. Head Z felt that it was the parents’ role to nurture in the Faith; but the school should offer support. At School W evangelism is “played down”, although “the school acknowledges God”. Some felt that the church school should teach RE with at least a Christian slant; others, however, saw no difficulty in the church school simply following the LEA’s Agreed Syllabus, where Christianity is taught as one Faith amongst many. Nevertheless, some saw no difficulty in the idea of the school being used as a vehicle for evangelism; for “the salvation of the church is [to be found in] its church schools”.<sup>54</sup>

The question of whether admission ought to be related to church attendance is fundamental to the whole debate. Virtually all interviewees recognised the importance of church going as part of a faithful Christian life. Where certain governors were exercised was in seeking to build in other faith-related criteria to their policies, not least to ‘protect’ the Anglican with a lifelong commitment, but not particularly frequent church attendance. That has clearly led to some limited debate on the nature of being a Christian, although it would seem likely, from the responses made by governors in particular, that the discussion focused more on the practical issues than on the theological. This has led to certain admission policies providing points for all kinds of disparate activities, to supplement those allocated for ‘mere attendance’.

A number of schools have needed to ‘tighten up’, some several times, on their specific criteria for admitting pupils on the basis of church affiliation. This has happened as

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<sup>52</sup> Head B.

<sup>53</sup> Head Q.

<sup>54</sup> Governor BB2.



policies come under pressure of increasing demand. Where there is more limited demand, the school can get away with a fairly 'loose' policy, or a 'loose' definition of religious commitment. However, the experience of appeals panels has evidently done much to concentrate governors' minds.

### **Specific Issues arising from the Interviews**

Interviewees raised a number of specific problems. Should church attendance be used as a criterion for admission to a school at all? Obviously, there are issues of principle, but there are also certain practical difficulties. In some rural areas there may only be a service in the local church on one Sunday per month – must the family become peripatetic in order to 'log' the attendances? What of those churches which make little or no provision for children? What of parents who have to work on Sundays, or genuinely need to visit granny? While many heads and governors interviewed felt a great sympathy for families where circumstances made regular church attendance difficult, they were equally aware of the need to have a system that was as objective as possible. This inevitably led to the creation of 'victims of the system'. Some Heads actively encouraged clergy to take account of such circumstances, but, they recognised that, in so doing, the 'playing field' became even less level.

How do clergy view the use of church attendance as one, or the main, criterion for admission? As one might expect from the Church of England there appear to be diametrically opposing views. There are those who welcome the opportunity provided. If families are introduced to church for the main purpose of gaining a place at the church school, then at least they are there, and the Gospel can be proclaimed to them. Head V commented that it is not enough for churches to rely on church schools to encourage church attendance – "we need to work more closely with the churches to enable them to keep them". There are clearly some clergy who take a very negative view of the use of

church attendance as an admissions criterion. Some for very pragmatic reasons: it causes them hassle, either because it places considerable responsibility on them to keep some kind of record for attendance (easier for the child at Sunday School than for the parent at morning worship), or it creates pastoral difficulties for them (families have threatened to withhold their financial contribution to the church unless the minister provides sufficient evidence for the child to gain a place at the preferred school). Others have more principled objections: (i) it is simply wrong to use church attendance in this way; the worship of God is not something that should gain one 'points'; (ii) such a process fails to take account of very genuine reasons why some people are unable to attend church, but whose Christian commitment is held to be genuine; (iii) church attendance is, in any case, a very narrow measure of Christian commitment; (iv) such a system encourages hypocrisy, with parents cynically attending church simply to gain a place at a church school.

Of course there are some clergy who are simply against church schools. Some evidently feel that they are divisive, not least because they provide the opportunity of some 'better' families 'escaping' their local school (which, it is further alleged, would benefit by their presence and support). Others argue that church schools are an anachronism, and have no place in a modern inclusivist age; or that the church ought no longer to have any direct role in the provision of education.

One specific problem arising from the above, noted in many schools, was with the accuracy of clergy information. Head CC spoke eirenically of clergy being "kind-hearted"; Head V, however, spoke of clergy "succumbing to parental pressure" and lying. Among positive motives mentioned were the desire on the part of the minister to gain, perhaps for pastoral reasons, a particular child a place at the church school; among negative motives was the intention of sabotaging either a school or a system with which they disagreed in principle. Many respondents designated as the greatest weakness of their system the need

to rely on third parties for evidence, and sometimes on large numbers of them where it was almost impossible to ‘moderate’ their information. All recognised that they were placing a considerable power – in effect the decision as to whether a child gained entry to a school – into clergy hands.

If church attendance is to be ‘measured’ should it be that of the child or the parent, or both? Where the child’s attendance at church is taken into account, on the grounds that it is the child who is to become a member of the school’s community, there remains the question as to whether this should be ‘weighted’ more than that of the parents. To do so may increase the chance for a child who is him/herself committed, but who is not supported in attendance at church by the parent, to gain a place. Head AA explained that if the child attended without parental support, and they felt (after interview) that the attendance was “genuine”, they would “inflate the child’s points accordingly” – so much for objectivity. Of course, it is always possible that the child attends church/Sunday school by parental ‘dictat’, or because it is their duty as member of a uniformed organisation. The data (on the application form) may be reliable, concluded Head AA, “but is it valid?”. That is one of the reasons why School Z, for example, takes account only of parental attendance. Governors believe that it is the parental “association” with the church that is most important. Head Z also explained that the National Society had advised them that as it was the parent, and not the child, making application, they should not take account of the child’s church attendance. Where a school does take equal account of both child and parental attendance it may do so because the success of the child at the school is thought to depend on the parent’s own commitment to the school’s ethos.

Measuring involvement in the life of the church raises a multitude of problems, but most crucially, how one is to compare one kind of involvement with another. It is also the case that some churches offer fewer opportunities for involvement. Head Z argued that



“commitment is more than involvement [but] you can measure involvement, and not commitment”. He went on to comment that parents were much happier to be told that they had not gained a place at the school because of their relative lack of involvement with the Church: “they become very angry if you question their commitment”, because although they accept that they may not be very involved, they would still affirm their commitment.

Perhaps most fundamentally: how is all this information to be verified? Schools must ensure that their procedures are objective. Interviewees almost universally worried about the fairness of a system which relied on external validation (by the clergy, on the whole). Schools evidently found it very difficult to be able to guarantee a ‘level playing field’: if counting church attendances, then while the church may have Sunday School registers for the child, it is unlikely (though clearly not out of the question) that there is a register of parental attendance. Furthermore unless the information required by the school is reasonably precise, how may it be moderated? It is obviously very difficult to compare references without falling into subjectivity. Many of those interviewed did not appear to recognise the difference between requesting information (how frequently does the family attend church?) and seeking a reference (do you think this child would benefit from a place at this school?). It would appear that some schools even look for a combination of both, not appreciating how the ‘reference’ can overwhelm the facts, and in many of the cases examined in this research, not really being able to explain clearly how one child gained priority over another. Again, as noted above, can the clergy be relied upon to provide accurate information? It is of particular interest that in a number of schools where Roman Catholic children were admitted, a common comment referred to “problems” with RC priests. Some RC priests actually refuse to provide any information at all, presumably on the grounds that they are against RC children attending CE schools on principle. There was also concern expressed about forms being completed deliberately inaccurately – possibly because the RC priest did not feel he has any commitment to the CE. There are an

increasing number of churches where clergy and lay leaders move round a 'circuit', and so will not be in a particular church each week. How are they to verify attendance information? There are further problems when clergy are asked to assess applications against somewhat vague criteria using terms like 'strong' and 'weak'; how are these terms to be compared? It is evidently not always the case that schools provide clergy with sufficient guidance as to what they are looking for.

A further complication for many schools was the use of the interview as part of the selection procedure. All those which used it, felt they were right to do so,<sup>55</sup> and until 2005 it is entirely legal, so long as they ask questions related to religious commitment. However, it is a process which can be highly subjective. Obviously there are a number of variations in the way the interview method is used: are all to be interviewed, or just those on the border-line of the other selection criteria? Are both pupils and parents to be interviewed, or just pupils (no schools were found which interviewed parents only)? Are pupils interviewed in the presence of their parents? Does the interview come before other kinds of 'assessment' or after, and how do the two methodologies complement each other? Some ask children to relate Bible stories, or to recall the theme of last Sunday's church service, or the colour of the vestments, but are they testing knowledge (which will inevitably be affected by ability) or commitment (an inner attitude)? How can the interviewer be sure that parents have not coached their children, or that the interview may favour more articulate families?<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that, even accidentally, issues (such as parental employment/ability to contribute to the school) might emerge, which will influence the interviewer. The resource implications of using interviews seem to be enormous (the Head of a London CE school claimed in the *Church Times* that it cost her

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<sup>55</sup> See articles by Yates J C and Phillips E, *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary Heads*, Issue 11, Feb. 2003.

<sup>56</sup> West A & Hind A, (2002) 'Exploring the extent of overt and covert selection', [www.risetrust.co.uk](http://www.risetrust.co.uk).



school around £20,000 a year<sup>57</sup>). In its defence Head AA argued that the interview was used “to test the truth of the written submission”; this includes testing the clergy submission, because some clergy “conveniently gloss over” the truth. Head BB argued that “you get a feel of what the family is like”, and also give them the opportunity to provide additional information, because “some people do not do themselves justice on paper”. Governor BB2 felt that the interview gives the family the opportunity “to sell themselves”, and to show their understanding of the requirements of the school; he concluded that he would be “very suspicious” of schools which did not interview. In any case “some families say that the interview attracts them to the school”.<sup>58</sup> The issue becomes irrelevant from 2005.

While the family in question may actually attend church, why do they do so? Although all interviewees recognised that there were some families where church attendance was motivated mainly, if not entirely, by the desire to gain a place at the school, they all agreed that the numbers were probably far less than were often supposed. Several commented that if families did attend church weekly for four years simply to gain a place at the school, then they applauded that measure of commitment, even if it was for “the wrong reasons”.

Do girls tend to go to church more than boys? Bearing in mind the fact that girls’ achievement is better, this is a significant issue. Certainly it appeared to be the experience of many schools that the greater the link between admission and church attendance, the greater the number of girls admitted. A number of reasons were suggested to explain this phenomenon: younger girls are more biddable than boys; girls are happier to sing hymns or attend Sunday School; there are more alternative boys’ activities on Sunday mornings. No-one suggested that girls are naturally more religious than boys!

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<sup>57</sup> *Church Times* 27/4/01, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Assistant Head BB.



Among significant ecclesiological matters discussed were the question of whether church schools are for Anglicans only, or for other Christians as well, and the effect of certain policies on ecumenical relationships. Mention has already been made of School C which moved from undersubscription, through to the time when virtually all those admitted claimed Christian credentials. During this latter period, in practice around 30% of the intake were members of the Methodist Church, and the admissions policy actually guaranteed 15% of places formally to members of other Christian denominations. However, the Governors found that this policy was actually excluding some Anglican families from the school. They sought advice from their Diocese, and were told that because their Trust Deed made reference to the school being originally established “for the benefit of members of the Church of England”, they could reasonably place a ‘priority to Anglicans’ clause in their policy. They now find themselves in the situation where other Christian groups are excluded. That has led to many Methodist families (for example) leaving their own church in order to attend their local CE parish church, and so gain admission to the school as Anglicans. It does not take a great deal of imagination to reflect on what the Free Churches think about this! At the time of interview the Governors were actively considering whether to remove the denominational ‘tag’ altogether. This in itself will force them to face the question of the relevance of the school’s Trust Deed.

In this particular case the Trust Deed was written in 1926, but in many other cases it originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, or before. How much influence ought an historic document have on the development of a modern school, and one which has seen many other changes in its status – grammar/secondary modern to comprehensive; direct grant to maintained status etc. – will be a matter for debate. How can the social and political circumstances of (say) the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, be relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup>? How then does one judge where the balance of hurt should fall through any changes to the policy – inevitably there will be winners and losers? In the case of School C, the removal of the denominational criterion would tend to

affect those families whose church attendance has been less frequent, although they might be lifelong members of the Church of England. Both Governors C1 and C2 felt particularly strongly about this issue, and argued that Anglican priority should remain because “the Church of England pays” and because “they are **our** families”. Nevertheless, they were worried about the negative ecumenical signals being sent by the current policy.

But on what grounds should other Christian denominations be given equality with Anglicans in Anglican schools? After all (it may be argued) Roman Catholics, Jews and Moslems are given priority in their own schools. The dilemma was characterised by Head D, when he distinguished between a community of Christians, and a community made up of “nominal or real Anglicans”. Which is to be preferred? Governor G1 commented that in the past when his school was struggling to attract Anglican families, it was the families of the Methodist Church which loyally supported the school first. Implied was the hope that this would not be forgotten!

A further ecumenical issue is again to do with ‘weighting’. Where children from Free Church families are specifically mentioned in the admissions policy, are they treated differently from Anglicans? We have already seen that a simple policy of priority to Anglicans may actually prevent non-Anglicans from gaining admission. An alternative situation is not where they are barred from admission, but where their ‘hurdles’ are significantly higher. Indeed, in some schools an Anglican actually needed less church attendance for admission than a member of the Free Churches.

A number of schools which admit primarily on church attendance are exploring the issue of geographical catchment. Where the geographical spread of CE secondary schools is so varied, a particular school may be the only CE secondary school for many miles. When its admissions policy has no geographical boundaries, it will take children over a very large

area. Several schools reported children travelling 15 miles or more. Where the policy is based mainly on church attendance, it follows that as the reputation of the school spreads, there will be an increasing number of applications from families outside its traditional area of focus. It will therefore become increasingly difficult for families which live relatively close to the school to gain a place for their child. It is clear that some governors are worried about such a development, and believe it to be wrong that 'local' families are disadvantaged by applications from well outside what they perceive to be the 'natural' catchment of the school. Against this a number of arguments may be advanced: if church attendance is deemed to be important, then that must take precedence over other criteria. Secondly, on what grounds should geography be a criterion. Thirdly, as CE schools are so widely spread, it is wrong to disadvantage families which do not happen to live in proximity to one. School E has, in fact, begun to give priority to applicants living nearer to the school, not least because the Head and Governors felt that they were taking children away from a CE school in a neighbouring city which, being situated in an area of deprivation, was finding it more difficult to recruit ("a brief glimmer of principle"<sup>59</sup>).

There is clearly a complication regarding siblings. On the surface, any policy that gives weighting to siblings might be seen to be placing less emphasis on church related criteria. However, above all other criteria, a focus on siblings tends to lead to religious and/or cultural/economic self-perpetuation. Once any particular group is large enough, then a sibling-first policy simply means that, regardless of any other criteria, that group maintains its admissions dominance. So far as church related criteria are concerned, there may even be an additionally negative effect: if a family meets the church criteria simply in order to gain a place at the school, but has no genuine religious commitment, then children may these gain admittance 'on the coat tails' of the first sibling. It may be judged that a sibling-first policy could actually encourage cynical church attendance.

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<sup>59</sup> Head E.



## Some Interim Conclusions

A number of themes sum up the findings of the empirical research which, it must be stressed, was carried out before the publication of 'Dearing'. It is possible that document will cause Governors and Heads to think further about the issues.

Firstly, it is clear that despite some limited thought (and very limited theological or ecclesiological reflection) given to the formulation of admissions policies, most have been constructed dealing with the situation in which the school finds itself, either historically, or in changing circumstances, rather than being based on any vision the Governors might have for their school, and its role as a part of the Church of England. Secondly, Governors find it very difficult to think theologically, and have often seemed ill-served by their Dioceses when they have sought to do so. Thirdly, Governors have found it very difficult to balance the somewhat rigid requirements of the law, with a policy that seeks to be based on personal faith. It is very difficult to make a direct correlation between a certain activity (attending church) and the motivation underlying that activity. Indeed, some policies, whilst being fair, are in danger of being unjust. Fourthly, CE schools are not helped by the fact that despite affirmations by Synods, there is no guarantee of support for them at a local level; some members of the church actually deplore their existence. Similarly, there is often a lack of understanding in the local community, which may be compared with a very clear view of the purpose of RC schools. This will be a direct result of a lack of any clear idea of the church's mission (and so the mission of its schools) within the Church of England. That is due to a failure in ecclesiology.

Finally, so far as the various models are concerned, it seems quite clear that even within the so-called 'general focus' schools, there is no *raison d'être*, and one can only wonder why they remain church schools at all. There is some genuine commitment to the twin focus, but often that kind of policy appears to be the outcome of circumstances. Where

Governing Bodies come under pressure to increase the Anglican or Christian intake of the school (even at the expense of the community) then many seem quite happy to do so. The research has demonstrated both the fact of, and the movement towards, the 'domestic' function in recent years. While there is some support for the 'strong domestic' model, it is clear that in an ecumenical age, more Governors are keen to broaden out their policy from Anglican to Christian. As to the 'weak domestic model', this research has found no evidence of any rationale for a school of Faiths, other than the view that the school community ought, in some way, reflect the multi-Faith society. But even such schools often offer a derisory number of places to children of other Faiths.

These issues will be explored further in the penultimate Chapter, as we now turn to what is probably the most significant 'foray' of the church into the debate so far: the Dearing Report, and its somewhat contradictory aftermath.

## Chapter 7: 'The Way ahead': a wrong direction and a missed opportunity - the Dearing Review of Church Schools, 2001, and its aftermath.

Church schools were formally affirmed by the General Synod of the Church of England in November 1998. The Report presented to Synod, *Church of England Schools in the New Millennium*, referred to a "moment of opportunity" which had been created by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Church schools were seen to provide a "vital connection with the community" and with families whom "the church might not otherwise reach." In the Synod debate, the Archbishop of Canterbury argued:

It was not long ago that the clear trend was to minimise the religious character of church schools.....Now that trend is being reversed. We are more confident today about promoting the distinctiveness of our schools...If people want more of what we can offer, then we must find ways...of providing it. [Furthermore] church schools should be unafraid and unambiguous about their Christian and Anglican identity.<sup>1</sup>

Here, therefore, were set out the twin aspects of the new agenda: distinctiveness and identity. It was clear that the Church of England valued its schools, for the debate led to a variety of supportive resolutions being passed, prefaced by the slogan:

That this Synod, believing that church schools stand at the centre of the church's mission to the nation.

It further invited the Archbishops' Council to "review the achievements of church schools and to make proposals for the future development of church schools and church colleges of further and higher education."<sup>2</sup> During 1999 the new Archbishops' Council established the Church Schools Review Group, chaired by Lord Dearing, which began work in January

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<sup>1</sup> Report in *Church Times* 11/98.

<sup>2</sup> source: NS leaflet *Serving our Schools*.



2000, having been given three tasks:<sup>3</sup> to consider how the distinctiveness of church schools relates to their effectiveness; to formulate a strategy for creating more CE secondary schools, and to make proposals for the training of Christian teachers. In October 1999 a Conference sponsored by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace promoted the idea that whilst 1 child in 5 had the opportunity of attending CE primary schools, only 1 in 20 had the opportunity of attending a CE secondary school, so (argued the Archbishop) many more CE secondary schools were needed in the system. That statement provided the starting point for Dearing.

Indeed, there were important questions to be asked, such as, 'in what ways are church schools distinctive?', and 'how does the church understand their role?'. It seemed to me that there was one particularly vital question not being asked: 'What does the presence and activity of these schools say about the nature of the Church of England itself?'. As I argued in a review of an essay published by the current General Secretary of the Board of Education:

.....as we prepare for a new millennium, we must extend the debate even further, because only when we can agree on a satisfactory answer to the question: 'what is the nature of the church of which our schools are a part?', can we really tease out what ought to be the role of our church schools.<sup>4</sup>

The Review Group published its Consultation Report in December 2000 (a much briefer interim Report had been published in July 2000). It was clear even from the Consultation Report that there were a number of issues which had been either taken for granted or, even when they had been considered, had been insufficiently developed.

It was hardly sufficient just to restate the General Synod's assertion that church schools are (somehow) "at the centre of [the church's] mission to the nation" without analysing what

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<sup>3</sup> *Church Times* 23/7/99.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads* April 1999, p. 23.

that means and whether such an affirmation can be upheld. It seemed unlikely that it would be accepted without caveat either by committed church members, or by others. For most people the parish lies at the centre of the church's mission. While it is statistically true that church schools now come into contact with more people than the parishes, the parochial system is the more recognised vehicle of mission. Even if the church's mission were simply to provide a general education to the population, then it only does so to a minority. Or if the church's mission were simply to be in touch with people, then one could see how important church schools would be in this aim. But mission must be more than this.

Even more difficult was the fact that, despite the commitment given to church schools by the church nationally and locally, it could not be said that such support was universal. There are many opposed to church schools. The Revd David Jennings was quoted as saying:

I am not sure we need church schools in the society we live in at the moment. Churches run the risk in a multicultural and predominantly secular society of establishing something that is not entirely real and, at worst, quite divisive.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to see how any aspect of the church (having such inconsistent support) could be central to its mission. It had to be questioned, therefore, whether the Synod statement was a help or a hindrance to the Review, and whether it was an exercise in hyperbole. Of course, no one could deny that church schools, from the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, had become increasingly accepted by those in power, and even more popular with parents, than one might have anticipated in the 1980s. However, it is important to consider why this was so, and whether that acceptance is of itself enough to embark upon a great expansion of the sector, unless there is a clear rationale for doing so. Motives for supporting 'church education' require exploration. There was little evidence in the Consultation Report that the Review Group thought to do so.

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<sup>5</sup> TES 23/2/01.

Historically, the great period of church school expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century “came at a time when the state did not [provide schools].”<sup>6</sup> However, the implication of this was left unexamined by the Report. The days when the church provided numerous social services because the State did not, are well over. Now that the State makes universal provision in many areas of basic service, why should the church continue doing so? It does not do so in, for example, the general provision of health care. Even the argument put forward that what the church is trying to do is “not simply to provide the basic education needed for human dignity. It is to offer a spiritual dimension to the lives of young people....” is insufficient of itself. According to the law, all schools should be providing for the spiritual needs of their pupils. To argue that church schools do it better begs several questions: is there, for example, empirical evidence to suggest that this is actually the case (Kay and Francis’ research, reviewed above, suggested otherwise).

The claim that ‘now is the time’ to build on the achievements of the past (by increasing the number of church schools), was simply asserted. But why should the church “reaffirm and develop its mission to the education of those who have least in life.”<sup>7</sup> by providing schools? Education is now comprehensively provided by the State. Furthermore, what evidence is there that the provision that the church might make is superior to that which might equally be made by the state? Even church schools have been known, in areas of challenge, to fail OfSTED inspections. Many church schools are successful schools. But are they successful because they are church schools (i.e. the success derives essentially from this status), or because of the nature of the communities they serve?

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was deemed appropriate to educate “in the principles of the Established Church.” The situation is greatly different today. Establishment continues to be questioned; the nature of education is entirely different; we live in a multi-Faith and, some

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<sup>6</sup> *Op cit.* para 1.2 p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* para 1.5 p. 5.



would argue, a post-Christian society. Do church schools still educate “in the principles...” and what are those principles? *The Book of Common Prayer*, recognised as a prime source for the principles of the Church of England, has no place in the National Curriculum, and one suspects, a very limited place in the teaching of RE, even in church schools.

It might, therefore, be argued that the only justification for the church being involved in education today is to make some kind of ‘specialist’ contribution, rather than to duplicate what the state is providing. This then raises the fundamental question of the nature of the distinctiveness of church schools. Neither the Consultation nor the Final Report ever came to grips with this.

The Consultation Report did, however, seek to maintain the multi-model tradition. In Paragraph 4.41<sup>8</sup> we read that governors’ reflections on the circumstances of their schools “...can validly lead to a range of outcomes”. Again, the definite statement in Paragraph 3.1 that there is no “one model of a church school to which all should conform,”<sup>9</sup> sets out the principle of variety unambiguously. Furthermore there was approval given to flexibility in another vital area: “there will be different interpretations of distinctiveness.”<sup>10</sup>

Moving to ‘mission’, it appears somewhat contradictory to say that “church schools are not, and should not be, agents of proselytism,”<sup>11</sup> in view of the fact that this Report made it clear that some kind of evangelism was appropriate. Various worthy statements were made: that church schools should proclaim the faith by which they live; provide opportunities for people who wish to find out what lies behind their work to do so; be places where other Faiths are respected. Not “seeking to impose its faith” was presumably a quite proper rejection of indoctrination. It would, however, be interesting to know

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.23, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.4, p. 10.

precisely what the Group had in mind when it wrote of “offering [faith] as a gift to be experienced....”<sup>12</sup> It may be that these thoughts were based on the notion of faith being ‘caught rather than taught’, but they ignored the issue as to whether state-funded schools are places where this kind of activity ought to be going on.

The *TES* ran a front page headline in February 2001: “God Help Us: But is it the church’s place to run state schools?”<sup>13</sup> and the article itself<sup>14</sup> was headlined: “Backlash against church schools drive”. The Dearing Review, and the Government’s bullish acceptance of what it was saying, had clearly stirred up the anti-church-schools ‘lobby’, even before the final report had appeared. Richard Dawkins wrote an article in the same edition<sup>15</sup> in which he argued that “sectarian religious schools serve only to promote prejudice, confusion and division.” Further concerns were raised by Anthony Grayling: “Given the harm that religions do....in the way of conflict, war, persecution and oppression and preventing the growth of science and freedom of thought, I object profoundly to my taxes being used to this end.”<sup>16</sup> Even some clergy attacked the emerging proposal to build more church schools.

On the other hand, if it had been accepted that the church had no place providing educational opportunities for the nation, perhaps the nurturing of faith for children of families who have actively chosen a church school for that purpose might have been seen to be rather different. Ironically, Paragraph 3.4 concluded with an almost throwaway statement that pupils should not be “expected to make a Christian commitment”.<sup>17</sup> What of the many church schools, particularly, secondary schools, which make faith commitment a criterion for admission?

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.20 p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *TES*, 23/2/01.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17 ‘No faith in the absurd’.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Dearing (2001) p. 10.

The place of children of other Faiths in a church school is particularly complex, and deserved rather more consideration than was given in this Report. It is not apparent what was meant by ‘encouraging’<sup>18</sup> those of other Faiths. Indeed, there are many Christians who would argue that other Faiths are in error. The whole question of Christian relationships with other Faiths is a major theological concern, and the issues were given little consideration by the Group. Worship is simply one of many issues which requires attention. But even if it is right for Christians to “encourage those of other faiths,” is it right to use church schools to do this? Once again, some rationale was needed. It can certainly be argued that “the life of the school would be enriched by the admission of some children from other Faiths,”<sup>19</sup> but it cannot simply be assumed. At the same time, the notion of the school benefiting “from the participation of children from Christian homes”<sup>20</sup> sends out confusing signals. More fundamentally (as was argued elsewhere in the Report) the idea that a church school ‘needs’ Christian families in order for it to sustain its Christian ethos, was finally ignored in favour of inclusivism.

One fundamental criticism of the Consultation Report which also applied to the Durham Report, is that in identifying the ‘domestic’ and the ‘general’ functions, no real thought was given to how the two different functions might, in practice, operate together. Certainly having considered a variety of arguments – theological (to a point), educational and economic, the Durham conclusions were somewhat pessimistic, no doubt because it would appear that in the minds of the members of the Commission, pragmatic, financial and legal, arguments tended to hold sway. Waddington’s green paper argued that a dual or twin focus ought to be possible, and provided some suggestions as to how that might be achieved. The Review Group seemed to be taking the same kind of line, although paradoxically placing greater emphasis on the presence of Christian children in the school.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* para 1.3 p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.44 p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.42 p. 29.



There were, therefore, two substantial issues which are not given adequate consideration either by Waddington, or by the Review Group: which has the most persuasive rationale, the 'general/service' function, or the 'domestic/nurture', and furthermore, is it possible to hold the two together in a single school. Will not inclusiveness dilute distinctiveness?

In terms of the 'general' function, the appeal in the Consultation Report was to a "theology of service", but how far this vocation of service "to all humanity as children of God"<sup>21</sup> extends to providing schools "for the nation" was not demonstrated. But unless this question is answered adequately, it may well appear that the only remaining possible justification for church schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the 'domestic' function. To say this is not to denigrate the work of those primary schools (the majority) and secondary schools (the minority) which do seek to serve their local communities. They are where they are, doing what they are doing, as a result of historical circumstances, and so long as the State is happy to perpetuate their function then they should be supported in their work by the church. However, the question should not be 'ducked', as the Report did, as to whether there is an appropriate rationale today for their existence.

While no Christian would want to argue against a 'Magnificat theology': "The hungry he has satisfied with good things, the rich sent empty away,"<sup>22</sup> it is quite another thing to apply that theology uncritically to the church's institutional involvement with society in general, and to its role in the provision of schools in particular. There is a major difference between the church providing a social service when the State failed to do so (and at a time when most people considered themselves Anglican), and the same provision being made once the State has become not only involved, but is the major player. The church is rightly involved in helping "those who have least in life" where there is a particular need which is not being properly met elsewhere, or through the efforts of individual Christians who wish

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<sup>21</sup> Dearing (2000) para 3.10 p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Luke* 1: 53.

their love of God to be reflected in their concern for their neighbour. To put the point bluntly: what theological imperative compels the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to provide ‘schools for the nation’? Whatever answer there may be to this question, it was not to be found in this Report. Rather a somewhat simplistic connection is made between social concern and social provision.

As to the ‘domestic’ function, it must be questioned whether the Consultation Document argued powerfully enough for this model. One significant question, barely explored in either Report, is how one combines nurture (‘nourishing’ in the Faith) with education (enabling people to make their own decisions) without compromising one or the other. The Review Group showed no awareness of Francis’ 1990 paper, whose discussion on ‘service’ they would also have found enlightening. As to their use of language, if the Group prefers ‘nurture’ to ‘domestic’, they need to be clear what they mean by the term, or what might be implied by its use for others. It is arguable that the development of a “religious character” and the provision of education “within the context of Christian belief and practice”<sup>23</sup> can only be properly achieved with the domestic/nurture model, not least because it does require some level of acceptance of shared basic beliefs and values.

A more powerful case might have been based on cultural and moral arguments. Assuming that education is never delivered in either a culture or value-free context, it seems reasonable for parents to be able to exercise at least some degree of choice over the context in which it is delivered to their children. One might wish to add arguments related to the provision of appropriate worship opportunities (which are clearly not widely provided in the secondary community sector), or the connections that might be built with worshipping communities etc. Of course, to argue this is to argue equally for other Faith-based schools,

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<sup>23</sup> Dearing (2000) para 3.19 p. 14.

and it will involve discussion as to how far such a policy might go: ought parents of strong socialist principles have the right to have their children educated in a socialist school?

Another apparent contradiction is holding ‘diversity of practice’ within a principle of ‘inclusiveness’. Is it possible to do so coherently? The Review Group’s argument appeared to run: ‘church schools want to be inclusive in the sense that they want to include (or at least not to exclude) all members of the local community’. But that is evidently not the case for all church schools, which use various admissions’ criteria. Furthermore, are schools which use church-focused admissions criteria necessarily ‘exclusive’? In practice, ‘inclusivity’ was becoming a mantra.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, the question is not so much what the balance should be, as whether any kind of balance is sustainable either in theory or in practice. This issue demands much more attention than it was given. How possible is it in practice to operate a ‘twin focus’ policy? There is plenty of evidence (identified in the empirical research) to point to the very real pressure placed on admissions policies by school popularity. There are no general answers, as each case is unique, but there is enough evidence to suggest that one should be very wary in assuming that pursuing the ‘twin focus’ can always work. Where it does work, it tends to be because it has been well established from the start.

When the Consultation Report was published in December 2000, Lord Dearing invited comments on it from both inside and outside of the church. It was made clear that this was an interim statement setting out “the provisional thinking” of the Review Group,<sup>25</sup> and it was implied that the Group’s further considerations would be informed by responses

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<sup>24</sup> As noted by Estelle Morris in her November 2001 address to the General Synod.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.



received. The Final Report was published on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2001.<sup>26</sup> In their introduction the Review Group claimed they had “used the Consultation Report as our text, amending and extending it to reflect the comments and contributions we have found persuasive;”<sup>27</sup> and so it is illuminating to compare the two texts, to ascertain where changes were made, bearing in mind that they received many hundreds of institutional and individual responses. How many did they find “persuasive”? In fact, in substance the final Report proved to differ little from the Consultation Report. This would suggest that either the bulk of responses to that document were supportive and affirming, or else the Review Group took little notice of any critical responses. However, the period of time between reports suggests that the whole exercise was rushed. It had first been thought that the Review Group might take up to three years over their task. Almost as soon as Lord Dearing had been appointed Chairman, he made it clear that he had no intention of taking that long.<sup>28</sup> The whole process took just 18 months. Bearing in mind that the Consultation Report was published in December 2000, with responses requested by the end of February 2001, and that the final report had been completed by April 2001, it is unsurprising that the two reports do not differ much.

Peter Inson, an ex- CE Secondary School Head, had an article on the Friday preceding the Report’s publication, headed ‘Church beware of the state’.<sup>29</sup> Inson had been “a determined advocate of church schools”. Now, however, “I find myself wary of the Government’s enthusiasm.” His main concern was that “the distinctive nature of church schools is threatened because they are being used to promote the interests of the party of government...” Inson warned the church that it was “in danger of entangling itself in an undignified re-badging exercise.” He pointed (correctly) to the difficulty in appointing committed Christian staff to lead the schools, and remarked on the support for church

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<sup>26</sup> Dearing (2001).

<sup>27</sup> Dearing (2001) p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Source: conversation with Lord Dearing, December 21st 2000.

<sup>29</sup> *TES* 8/6/01, p. 25.

schools that comes even from families which are “indifferent” or “hostile” to the church, but who “just want something better than the local comprehensive.” Why then, he asked, should the church use its scarce resources to build even more schools just “to assist politicians in their search for quick fixes?” Why, furthermore, “should the church seek to extend its mission into areas where it will become little more than an instrument of the Government, and in circumstances where it will not have the independence necessary to be true to itself?”

It is not altogether clear what Inson meant by “re-badging”, or precisely what kind of church schools he saw developing as pawns of Government. However, he ended with a question that went right to the heart of the debate, and for which one might have hoped to look to ‘Dearing’ for a definitive answer: “Why does it [the church] demand independence sufficient to ensure.....the admission of children whose families are genuinely supportive of the school...?” If by “genuinely supportive of the school” Inson means committed Christian families, it would seem that he was arguing for a rejection of the ‘service’ model, and a unequivocal statement from the church in favour of ‘nurture’. If that was the case, then he will have been disappointed.

The Press response to *The Way ahead* was a study in contrasts. The main CE newspaper, the *Church Times*, heralded it: ‘Fair wind blows for more schools, says Dearing’,<sup>30</sup> and provided an article and a leader comment. The main education newspaper gave it the barest mention in an inside page article about alleged “privileged intakes” for specialist schools, including church schools:

As the Church of England issued its Dearing Report pressing the case for 100 more Anglican secondary schools, a study highlighted the growing polarisation of poor and rich pupils as secondary schools become more diverse.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Church Times* 15/6/01.

<sup>31</sup> *TES* 15/6/01 p. 2.

A few more lines were given within another article highlighting the delay in opening a “pioneer CE academy”.<sup>32</sup> Here again the only detail was the call for an increase in the number of CE secondary schools, and the opposition of “secular groups”. In fact, expansion was the theme of the *Church Times* as well.

The main body of this Final Report began with a brief consideration of the historical context. It may be because of its brevity that the analysis is shallow, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewed through rose-tinted spectacles. Of course, as the Group itself stated,<sup>33</sup> it was not the task of the Report itself to trace the history of church school provision in any detail; nevertheless, it did tend to rely on the past to justify the proposals to build yet more schools. Furthermore, even though it recognises explicitly that there is now full State provision, it failed to draw the obvious conclusion: if the church made provision when the State did not, what is now the rationale for the church to make such provision in an age when the State does so quite fully?

The other significant historical point relates to the purposes of those 19<sup>th</sup> Century founders of church schools, and their present relevance. There are two issues and the Report gives little space to either: alleged service to the poor, and the nature and purpose of the curriculum. As to the first, the word ‘poor’ is obviously very imprecise. How do the poor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century compare with the poor of today? The Report actually referred to “those who have least in life”,<sup>34</sup> arguing that because it was these whom the church sought to serve in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it is these whom church schools should seek to serve today. As noted above, any serious historical survey of church school building in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century would raise a question mark over exactly whom it was that the church had in mind to serve, and why. Clearly, they were seeking to provide for those who could not afford to

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 2.3, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* para. 1.15 p. 4.



pay the prices of the ‘public’ schools (most of which had been established by the church), but it is equally evident that the church was not establishing schools in the cities, where the bulk of the genuinely poor lived. Indeed, many church schools were, and are, rural. All reference to poverty is relative, but it would seem to be the case that many founders of church schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought to provide for those who might today (if such comparisons can be made) be designated as being in ‘middle-income’ groups. So for the Review Group to argue that the task of the church today is to build on “the great achievements of an earlier age.....[and to] reaffirm and develop its mission...to those who have the least in life” was to misunderstand the past.

Furthermore, the intention of those pioneers of church schools was hardly to provide an education as that term is understood today, rather the aim was overtly religious and denominationally narrow (as befitted the spirit of the age). Indeed, there were many in the church who considered the education of the poor in reading and writing to be dangerous, in case they developed ideas above their station. In other words the Report was anachronistic. Built on an idealised view of history, many of its arguments were fundamentally flawed. It should be noted that in the section of the Report devoted to RE, reference is made to church schools giving “particular weight to the Christian faith as held by the Church of England”.<sup>35</sup> Without entering the minefield as to precisely what that means, we may hear echoes of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century maxim: education in the principles of the Established Church. But who would want such a thing today, even if they are in active membership of the church?

What *The Way ahead* had to say about the purpose and focus of church schools is the central issue. It was based on the contention that church schools “stand at the heart of the church’s mission to the nation.” The Report acknowledged that not all believe that to be

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.12, p. 22.

the case, and quoted a diocesan response which contended that “there is much ground to be covered, many hearts and minds to be engaged and won over before the nub of the motion...is in place in the mind of the church,”<sup>36</sup> adding:

The whole church needs to develop a much clearer understanding of the role of church schools within Christian ministry and their importance as centres of Christian community, where the church offers service to all.<sup>37</sup>

Here we find three central issues which require considerable discussion: ministry (is it different from mission?), Christian community, and service (to a broader community).

It will be recalled that one of my main criticisms of the Consultation Report was that it lacked a rationale for having church schools at all. While that cannot be a criticism of the Final Report, what does remain at issue is the rationale actually proposed. Chapter 3 of the Report is entitled: ‘Why church schools: for what purpose and for whom?’ with the first subheading: ‘The church’s need to reach the young’. Paragraph 3.3 states the matter bluntly:

The church has a major problem in attracting young people to its services as a means of discharging its mission, and one that causes much concern. This bears directly on the future of the church.

The church is failing to persuade youngsters to attend church, and it is now up to church schools to undertake this evidently evangelistic task, for the popularity of church schools provides a “reverse image of attendance at church services”.<sup>38</sup> Paragraph 3.4 points out that this ‘captive audience’ is 900,000 strong, and 3.8 explicitly refers to the fact that these children “provide access to parents, very many of whom would otherwise have no contact with the church.” Introducing young people to church is deemed to be

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.1 p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.4, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.5, p. 10.

....[a] measure of effectiveness of church schools....whether they come into church or not, church schools are giving them the opportunity to know Christ.....[and] it may well be that the Christian grounding at school will bring them into church when they have families of their own. The justification for church schools lies in offering children and young people an opportunity to experience the meaning of the Christian faith.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that for ‘Dearing’, the single rationale for church schools is their role as a vehicle for evangelism of the ‘fringes’: “if the children are not coming to us we must go to them.”<sup>40</sup> In claiming that church schools should “provide a foundation of experience of the Christian life and a body of knowledge of the Christian faith that can sustain their pupils throughout their lives,”<sup>41</sup> it never seems to have occurred to the Review Group to enquire into how successful church schools have been in pursuing this aim.

Paragraph 3.5 bemoans the fact that because there are far less secondary places than there are primary, that means the church is “losing contact with most of the church primary school children just at the time of life when they need answers to their questions and support in their faith”.<sup>42</sup> These few paragraphs set the tone for the whole document both in its substance, and with regard to the assumptions it makes, such as all children in CE primary schools having a faith to support. Even community schools could, through a good programme of RE, help answer questions. Of course, the fundamental issue is: ought church schools be engaged in the evangelistic work of the church? The answer, for the *Church Times* leader writer is affirmative: “.....church people can respond positively to what is one of the greatest opportunities for mission since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>43</sup>

The Report claimed to eschew proselytism, yet favour evangelism. The distinction is made thus: the former is where “pupils are expected to make a Christian commitment”, while the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.9, pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.14, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.8, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> 15/6/01 p. 8.



latter is where “pupils and their families” are given the opportunity “to explore the truths of Christian faith, to develop spiritually and morally, and to have a basis for choice about Christian commitment.”<sup>44</sup> One wonders again about the appropriateness of harking back to those founders of 19<sup>th</sup> Century church schools (even with the caveat that they were “responding to the needs of their time as they saw them”),<sup>45</sup> for it would seem likely that what they were trying to achieve would be closely related to proselytism. They would have had the catechism taught by rote, and it is unlikely that there would have been much consideration of other Faith stances (including the views of Dissenters). The assumption then would be that memorably made by Parson Thwackum:

When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England.<sup>46</sup>

The intention was to ensure that pupils knew what was assumed to be their own religion. The proposals of the Review Group are more modest; the evangelistic touch is to be light. But could it be otherwise today? Standards of education and the expectations of society being what they are, any attempt at hard-nosed proselytism would be doomed to failure, even if it were to be considered acceptable. But is a softer approach any more acceptable? Is that what schools, even church schools, are for?

The Report made the point (presumably because the Review Group felt this had been misunderstood) that church schools should be understood to be “at the centre” of the church’s mission, rather than ‘being the centre’ of that mission: “we take this to mean that they stand alongside the parish churches, which lead the missionary work of the church....”<sup>47</sup> How schools do this will “need to be interpreted according to the

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<sup>44</sup> Dearing (2001) para 3.12, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.13, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Fielding H (1749) *Tom Jones* Bk 3; Chap 3.

<sup>47</sup> Dearing (2001) para 3.10, p. 11.

circumstances in which individual schools find themselves.”<sup>48</sup> Here is an explicit, albeit fleeting, recognition of the permissibility of different models of church school.

Whereas the Consultation Report failed to deal with the essential question: ‘what is the Church of England’s mission to the nation?’, the Final Report did so. The arguments reflect some consideration of a paper jointly produced for the Review Group by Professor Jeff Astley, David Lankshear and myself.<sup>49</sup> The Report summarises this mission as being “to open up people to what God desires for them”,<sup>50</sup> although it is not altogether clear what that means. Presumably, if it happened to be God’s will that a person followed the Moslem Faith, then that would become part of the mission of the Church of England. But even if the church school is understood to “stand alongside” the parish, and to share in its mission, it is the school which is the major player, for “without the church schools the church would be reaching only a small minority of young people.”<sup>51</sup> The Report goes on to quote the Archbishop of York’s comment that “clergy will meet far more family members in a school than they are likely to encounter in Sunday services.”<sup>52</sup>

A recurring refrain is the assertion that “no church school can be considered as part of the church’s mission unless it is distinctively Christian.”<sup>53</sup> What the Report fails to address is the question of how that distinctiveness is to be achieved with an ‘inclusive’ admissions policy. Stress is also laid on the need to appoint Christian teachers,<sup>54</sup> although, apart from the appeal to the church to recover teaching as a vocation,<sup>55</sup> little real recognition is given to the practical difficulties of achieving this.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.13, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Published in full in the *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads*, Issue 8, April 2001, pp. 4 – 10.

<sup>50</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 3.11, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.6, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.8 p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. *Ibid.* para. 1.11, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* para. 1.14 p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* chap. 6 *passim*.



The Report develops the notion of distinctiveness by outlining a particular approach to the curriculum, one which challenges pupils to look beyond. Indeed, it describes something that ought to be found in any good school. When the Report speaks of enabling pupils to “grow towards full humanity,”<sup>56</sup> or “developing the potential of each child as an individual,”<sup>57</sup> the implication is that this is a concern only of church schools. Obviously that is not the case. Distinctiveness is also claimed for “Christian values and principles...[which] run through every area of school life as the writing runs through a stick of rock”.<sup>58</sup> All this, it is argued, is offered as “a gift to be experienced” and that “gift is Christ”.<sup>59</sup> Or, put another way, “our distinctive purpose and contribution in education is to offer Christ.”<sup>60</sup> Even though it is not altogether clear as to what this means, the language used is the language of faith, yet no justification or explanation is ever offered for relating these aims to families of no faith, or of other Faiths, nor indeed why it should do so. Even if it were to be accepted that there is a theology of service which justifies providing education, this is as far as the argument goes. No consideration is given to the consequent ecclesiological issues: what is the nature of the church which is providing this distinctive education and, more to the point, is what is being provided going to have meaning for those outside of the church?

The Report refers to the church school being “a community of faith” which reflects “the nature of the Trinity, a life shared and defined by reference to others”; a very distinctive concept. But again, no consideration was given to how this Christian community is formed, particularly as immediately following this section, the disclaimer is again made: “Church schools will not actively seek to convert children from the faith of their parents, but pupils will experience what it is to live in a community that celebrates Christian

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.26, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.42, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.25, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.26, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.42, p. 18.



faith...”<sup>61</sup> It is not at all clear, but assuming that this refers not only to families of other religious Faiths, but also to families of no religious faith at all, then one can only wonder how genuine or how useful this experience of living in a such a community will be. So what exactly is meant by describing these schools as communities of faith, and just how many Christian children would it take to form a Christian school community?

The Report rightly notes that the issue of distinctiveness is “posed most directly for Voluntary Controlled schools...”, and goes on to assert that “they should always be and be seen to be distinctively Christian institutions.”<sup>62</sup> It recognises that there are some VC schools which are “unsure why they were church schools” and were sometimes indistinguishable from Community Schools.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless the value of VC schools is affirmed as “immense”<sup>64</sup> because they tend to be inclusive and serve the whole community. Nevertheless, and this may appear to be somewhat illogical in view of the points made, when new church schools are established the “normal preference” should be for VA status.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the Group argues that VC schools should seek to become more explicitly Christian, by introducing some element of religious affiliation in their admissions policies (appearing to forget they are controlled by LEAs). Perhaps the best way of doing this is for VC schools to seek to change to VA status.<sup>66</sup> But if VC schools have such value, why not have more of them? These are significant statements by the Review Group, because in stating their preference for VA status, they implicitly admit that VC status is unsatisfactory. Why then affirm it?

The Report argues that the “ministry of service is well established” in the ‘general’ activity of church schools as supported by ‘Durham’. It links the “theology of service” (from the

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.28, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.5, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* para. 4.7, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.19, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.21, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.38, p. 28.

Astley paper) with the fourth aspect of mission: “work for human dignity”.<sup>67</sup> This represents “the Church of England’s visible commitment to the nation’s education and service to many different types of community.”<sup>68</sup> Specifically, this service is to be directed towards “children in disadvantaged areas”.<sup>69</sup> They obviously felt no need to argue why this particular form of mission should be exercised in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

However, despite this, the emphasis on distinctiveness and nurture is stronger and more explicit in ‘Dearing’ than it was in ‘Waddington’. But this is not the result of any genuine consideration of the issues; rather it is pragmatic:

....since the time of the Durham Commission the nurture purpose of the church [church schools?]....has gained in emphasis. Following the increased standing of church schools with parents and more generally with society, and the associated demand for places, it has been inevitable that governing bodies in Voluntary Aided schools should respond to that demand from Christian parents. Moreover, in an increasingly secular society the church is right to respond to the concern of Christian parents to give their children the opportunity to experience what it is to learn in a distinctively Christian environment.<sup>70</sup>

The rationale for the nurture function is thus given almost as an afterthought. But it is there, and we read that it is justifiable for a school to

....conclude that its task is to nurture Anglican or other Christian children in their faith and to allocate all its resources accordingly [because] there are other schools...to which children can go...<sup>71</sup>

So if there is alternative provision (which is mostly the case for secondary schools) then it is perfectly acceptable for church schools to be exclusive in their admissions policies. Within months of the publication of the Report, this powerful affirmation (“allocate all its resources”) of the ‘nurture’ role was to be overwhelmed by the demand for inclusiveness, and the church was afterwards to pretend that these words were never written.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.16, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.34, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* para. 4.23, p. 24.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.19, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* para. 4.43, p. 29.



The conclusion is unchanged from that of the Consultation Report: the Review Group seems to have been convinced, like Waddington, that the ‘twin focus’ was the way forward, and indeed, saw “no dichotomy between the service and nurture purposes of the church in education.”<sup>72</sup> Although it is not made explicit whether the twin focus is to be found in the system as a whole, or in individual schools, the two above quotations would seem to imply the traditional view: twin focus within the system.

However, the emphasis is on service as a “gospel imperative”: the church must “engage with society and its institutional structures precisely because there is good news to offer.” The rationale for service is, therefore, not service for its own sake, but evangelism (the position explicitly deplored by Francis back in 1990). But why through education? Because this enables the church to share in people’s life, and because church schools offer stability “in a world of shifting sands” and as “an enduring alternative to the growing secular values of society,”<sup>73</sup> where they can “provide a real experience of God’s love for all humanity.”<sup>74</sup> Church schools, then, enable families to shelter from the “secular values of society”; although if they are not religious, one wonders why they would want such a shelter. Is the service provided shelter from secular values, or a shelter from some of the problems of the secular world that may be exhibited in secular schools – an accusation often made by those who believe that church schools simply provide a ‘haven’ for the middle classes? On the latter point the Report honestly outlines criticisms received from those opposed to church schools, particularly the British Humanist Association. There is some irony (apparently lost on the Review Group) in reporting the BHA view that the Dearing proposals are “a last ditch attempt [by the church] to regain influence and support,”<sup>75</sup> because paragraphs 3.3 – 3.9 seem almost contrived to invite this criticism. Nevertheless, the response that church schools are “a legitimate expression of diversity

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* para. 3.21, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.22, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.23, p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.34, p. 16.



within the educational system”<sup>76</sup> is entirely reasonable. The issue not addressed is ‘diversity for what purpose?’

One section of the Report is devoted to the notion of ‘inclusiveness’, which is contrasted to “separation from the community” (implicitly the local geographical community).<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere this is described as the church “working to serve that common good, and to develop greater mutual understanding, and....not aiming to promote a sectarian endeavour”.<sup>78</sup> It is specifically asserted that any new church schools should be “inclusive of the local community”.<sup>79</sup> No tension is acknowledged between distinctiveness and inclusiveness.

What are the implications for admissions policies? Surprisingly, the Report says very little directly about this central issue (similar to ecclesiological coyness about church membership). The Report claims (paras 4.2 and 5.9) to have the results of two surveys on admissions policies. In the first it was shown that

....rather more than three quarters of [schools] had a religious affiliation in their admissions criteria, but only a third of them had a religious category as the first criterion. In at least half of schools there was no need to put their oversubscription criteria into practice.<sup>80</sup>

No details were offered in the Report itself as to when these surveys were carried out, whether it included both primary and secondary schools, or what percentage of schools were surveyed. It was claimed that the second survey “confirmed [that there were] large levels of over subscription for places at many church secondary schools,” and we are told that some 80 secondary schools took part. Again it was not revealed whether these were ‘true’ secondary (not including middle-deemed secondary) and whether they included both

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.34, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.29, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* para 3.35, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.31, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.2, p. 19.

VA and VC. Further enquiries I took it upon myself to make to the Secretary of the Review Group have shed some light on these matters. Colin Hopkins confirmed<sup>81</sup> that paragraph 4.2 was based on research carried out by Jane Lankshear, while the survey referred to in paragraph 5.9 was done under the auspices of AASSH (the CE secondary schools' heads' organisation). Lankshear's research was primary school focused, and so is not relevant to this study. It is a pity that was not made clear in the Dearing Report, as paragraph 4.2, without that information, gives a misleading picture. As to the research carried out on behalf of the Dearing Group by AASSH, that was based on replies received from secondary VA and VC schools, together with some middle schools – both 'deemed secondary' and 'deemed primary', again both VA and VC. It was not possible to discover what percentage response there had been, nor even how many CE secondary schools had been circularised, but on the basis that responses were received from 75 secondary/middle-deemed secondary schools, that represents fewer than 38% of the potential total.<sup>82</sup> However, as Hopkins himself noted,<sup>83</sup> the spreadsheet of results, "set up by my Australian research assistant...[has] some eccentricities of geographical interpretation," with, for example, Trinity School, Belvedere (Rochester Diocese), being confused with Trinity School, Carlisle. Of course, the purpose of the survey was to look at levels of oversubscription, and so it tells us nothing about the nature of the admission policies involved. In fact, that exercise was not helped by the fact that, as Hopkins again very honestly noted, schools gave inconsistent information, which made it difficult to make any precise comparisons between types of school. That did not stop 'Dearing' using it.

In the section of the Report which considers partnership with LEAs and the response by Chief Education Officers, there is reference to the suspicion held by some CEOs that

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<sup>81</sup> E-mail 20/7/01.

<sup>82</sup> The "some 80 secondary schools" mentioned in para 5.9 includes 6 middle-deemed primary schools.

<sup>83</sup> Letter 2/8/01.



church schools' admissions policies aim to "introduce selection by the back door".<sup>84</sup> This point is developed by the specific accusation (true in some cases, as this research demonstrates) of subjectivity in the admissions process, "especially where interviews have been used to test religious affiliation."<sup>85</sup> The Review Group coyly remarks that "perhaps it is fair comment [concerning 'covert selection']...that such concerns apply to all types of school when oversubscription occurs." Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to recognise that this is a particular problem of using interviews.

So what advice did the Review Group offer? Building on its 'twin focus' philosophy, it asserted that any decision on admission policy "uniquely challenges a governing body to decide how it should balance its wish to serve the community in general and its wish to nurture children from Christian homes in their faith."<sup>86</sup> Of course, that is an entirely appropriate issue for those school governing bodies which adhere to the 'twin focus' philosophy, but what of those who do not? Furthermore, as noted, whilst urging VA schools to admit some children without the religious affiliation requirement, they urge VC schools to become more explicitly Christian by introducing some element of religious affiliation into their policies,<sup>87</sup> so as VA schools become less exclusively Christian, VC schools become less exclusively non-Christian. The result would be an undifferentiated system.

Then came another phrase to be ignored in the future: "the outcome of the deliberations of the governing body will properly reflect the particular circumstances of the school, and can validly lead to a range of outcomes."<sup>88</sup> Even though the Review Group was wedded to the 'twin focus', it held back from stating unambiguously that this was the right model for all

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<sup>84</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 4.23, p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.33, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.35, p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.38, p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.36, p. 27.



CE schools. Perhaps that is because the Group recognised the paucity of their own arguments for the ‘twin focus’? It is more likely that at that stage there was no intention to press for a single model; as we have seen, the Report affirmed both the nurture model and exclusive admissions policies, albeit with the caveat that such policies

....may lead to some misgivings on the grounds that the school is not associating with its local community, and not giving an opportunity for non-Christians to experience what it is to learn in a Christian environment. These misgivings are the greater if the local children who do not get in are from disadvantaged sectors of the community whereas the pupils admitted from further away are from better off districts. The misgivings can be especially strong if there is a racial dimension to this split.<sup>89</sup>

So, the argument continued, it is better if at least some places are offered to the local community, simply on the basis that people will feel left out, and excluded. But is this sufficient justification for inclusion?

This central issue was raised in a letter to the *TES*<sup>90</sup> by Ken Pleasant, Head of the Bluecoat School, Oldham, following criticism of that school for its alleged divisiveness in admitting only Anglicans in a multi-Faith area. He referred to his school’s historic purpose to provide education for Anglicans, and the pressure of oversubscription; he argued that to change his admissions policy in favour of other Faiths would “leave many Anglicans in the Manchester diocese....without their entitlement”. The term ‘entitlement’ was picked up by another correspondent,<sup>91</sup> who described Pleasant’s letter as “astonishing”. Terry Sanderson continued: “It seems to be accepted that the children of Anglican parents have these extra entitlements just because they are Anglicans. This is against all natural justice, given that we all – Muslims, Hindus, Jews and even atheists – have to pay for these schools.” It may be that the word ‘entitlement’ was unfortunate, but at least the issues were helpfully clarified: on the one hand there is the notion of faith schools which provide diversity for

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.44, p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> 6/7/01, p. 28.

<sup>91</sup> 19/7/01, p. 19.

the system and individual parents with the opportunity for education to be delivered in a sympathetic values context; separate from this is the question as to who pays for it. It seems entirely reasonable, if one accepts the argument for diversity and opportunity, that faith schools should not only be allowed to exist, but also that schools for other Faiths should be established (providing that the same basic rules are followed, e.g. the National Curriculum taught). So long as these schools do provide an appropriate education, and are subject to state inspection and national legislation, then there would appear to be every reason why the State should fund them. Equally, it would seem appropriate that the Faith body sponsoring them should, for its special ‘entitlements’ or ‘privileges’ (e.g. conducting worship according to the Faith) make an appropriate financial contribution. Obviously it will be a matter for debate as to how much this should be. In practice only a tiny percentage of the costs of church schools are provided by the Governors (even the official – now 10% - VA contribution is linked to buildings only). As to the ‘privilege’ of having ownership of their admissions, it will be noted that this ‘privilege’ is also held by Foundation schools, which are entirely state funded. In short, there are arguments that can be sustained for the continuation of state-funded Faith schools, even if those schools are exclusive, or relatively so, in their intakes.

However, the rationale provided by Dearing contrasts starkly, in its political pragmatism, with its previous ‘high’ theological language about service. Offering places to local children is

....an important factor in winning the hearts and minds of our prospective partners in discussing proposals for additional or expanded church schools, as well as furthering the mission of the church.<sup>92</sup>

The church wants more church schools, and in order to achieve this it is going to need political support; the only way that this support can be gained is to provide at least some

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<sup>92</sup> Dearing (2001) para 4.44, p. 29.

church school places for non-church members. Are these the crumbs from the table,<sup>93</sup> or are they bribes? Or in “furthering the mission of the church” do the ends validate the means? Whatever, even if one finds this argument compelling, no consideration was given to the difficulties in implementing a twin focus policy. All that is suggested is a “catchment or quota” system, with “‘open’ and ‘foundation’ places”.<sup>94</sup> However, the Report also recommended “an ecumenical approach to new schools”,<sup>95</sup> on the basis that resources and commitment could be shared. Yet no consideration was given at all to the concept of Christian nurture schools; in practice the growing ecumenical model.

There were also a number of quite radical proposals in the Report. 100 new church schools were to be established over the next 7 – 8 years,<sup>96</sup> although “only a limited number of [dioceses] would have the capital resources to finance one new Voluntary Aided secondary school.”<sup>97</sup> The church should therefore consider taking over existing schools,<sup>98</sup> as it is “an obvious partner”<sup>99</sup> – a claim which is never justified:

...unless the church can act successfully to find the teachers needed for the schools it already has, and for the increased provision recommended in our report, nothing will be achieved.<sup>100</sup>

That would seem to be a crucial factor.

The Report thus provided a rationale for church schools which was internally inconsistent, and sometimes downright contradictory. Both service and nurture have their place (although the latter is hedged around), yet how Christian distinctiveness is to be achieved within such a mixed community is left unexplained. The main purpose is evangelism, but

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<sup>93</sup> *Luke* 16: 21.

<sup>94</sup> Dearing (2001) paras 4.45 & 4.46, pp. 29 – 30.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* para 4.52, p. 31.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* para 5.17, p. 39.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* para 5.23, p. 40.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* para 5.28, p. 42.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* para 5.34, p. 43.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* para 6.2, p. 45.



with no apparent recognition that this would imply that state-financed church schools exists largely to compensate for the failure of the parishes. It is difficult to see how the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent to educating “in the principles of the Established Church” (the education v. nurture issue) can be justified, particularly where it is argued that the schools ought to be providing places for ‘non-members’ (the education v. evangelism issue). As the British Humanist Association was not slow to point out,<sup>101</sup> how is it possible to combine the intention to serve the whole community, with the intention to “foster the long-term well-being of the Church of England”. At the very least it casts doubts over the integrity of the church’s intentions. Is it seeking to provide an education for the whole community for purely altruistic motive, or in order to keep its numbers up on Sundays?

Despite the predictable support from the church press, the Dearing Report attracted considerable criticism from elsewhere. Polly Toynbee, writing in the Guardian, generated the headline: “We don’t need the church to educate our children.”<sup>102</sup> Toynbee is heavy on polemic, but light on argument. Any piece that begins “God may move in mysterious ways, but there is not much mystery in the way He runs His schools.....” is obviously not expected to be taken seriously. Although she points to the undoubted fact that “most motivated parents and the middle classes will always navigate every school (or health) system.....,” she claims that parents are more interested in results than religion, and in so doing fails to recognise there are many who genuinely wish for their child to be educated in a context which reflects the values and beliefs of the home. She levelled strong criticism at the Government in its support for building more church schools:

If all the government can find as a guiding light is a borrowed empty shell of faith very few parents believe in, it reveals an intellectual and moral hollowness. It is unprincipled cynicism to require ever more parents to adopt religion not because it is true, but because it will get their children a better education.

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<sup>101</sup> Letter, *TES* 6/7/01.

<sup>102</sup> *The Guardian Newspaper*, 15/6/01, p. 10.

She suggested that other groups (“consortia of teachers”) would jump at the chance of running schools so “why not open the doors to those who think they might do better? And keep religion in church, where it belongs.” Similar views were expressed in a programme in the Radio 4 series, *The Moral Maze*<sup>103</sup> (the particular focus was whether faith schools should receive state funding), where one contributor argued that faith schools were simply another kind of specialist school (exactly the same point was made by the Head of St Christopher’s Accrington)<sup>104</sup> initiated by the Conservative Government. In this case, it would seem logical to allow any special interest group (or at least, any “reasonable” group, the examples given were groups committed to pacifism or the outdoor life) to establish schools based on their particular philosophies. This would bring diversity to the system.

Following the rather dismissive response in the *TES* the weeks following brought what amounted to a full frontal attack by the Media. This was not always directed specifically at ‘Dearing’ (indeed, the Report could hardly be attacked on this particular issue), but at the alleged divisiveness of faith schools in general, and following ‘race riots’ in various northern towns, at two church schools in particular. However, the fact that the main issues were hardly fresh news (the racial unrest in Oldham occurred in May) would suggest that the reports were written as a response to Dearing, and the consequent high profile for CE schools, as well as to the Government’s intention to support the establishment of new ‘faith’ and ‘specialist’ schools.

A week following the publication of ‘Dearing’, the *TES* banner headline punned “Ghettos blasted”, with the headline for the actual report: “Schools accused of racial segregation”.<sup>105</sup> The admissions policies of the two Oldham schools meant in effect that they were virtually all white; certainly there was no chance for any non-Christian child to gain admission. The

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<sup>103</sup> 18/7/01.

<sup>104</sup> *AASSH Journal*, Issue 8, April 2001, p. 24.

<sup>105</sup> *TES* 22/6/01 pp. 1 & 3.



Diocesan Director of Education was quoted as saying that “church authorities would like to see both schools being more inclusive.” The article stated that the “Church of England believes that its schools should have a strong Christian character but also be inclusive”. Ironically this goes straight to the heart of the very dilemma which ‘Dearing’ never satisfactorily addressed. How are these two aims to be reconciled? By coincidence (presumably) a news report in the same edition was about the CE’s criticisms of training for heads (a failure to deal with ‘faith school’ issues), where John Hall was quoted as saying: “The headship of a church school is essentially the leadership of a Christian community....”<sup>106</sup> Both he and the Review Group seemed to think that there is no discontinuity between a Christian community and one that includes children (and so families) of other Faiths, or of no religious affiliation at all. What is a Christian community, if it is not a community of Christians?

The most frequently repeated charge against CE schools was ‘divisiveness’, and the two Oldham schools stood accused of “racial segregation.” The Liberal Democrat Education Spokesman, Phil Willis, was quoted as saying: “If we drive pupils into racial ghettos we may see in England what has already happened in Northern Ireland. Education could become a breeding ground for faith division, religious division and also social and economic division.”<sup>107</sup> The charge was explored further in an article entitled ‘Pupils “segregated” in riots town’, where a comment was made by a Head suggesting that “many parents” attend church only for the purpose of gaining a place at his school. The writer of the article (Fran Abrams) asked the question: “...are white parents in Oldham choosing schools on racial – even racist – criteria?” She concluded:

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.



It is hard to find a headteacher or education department official who believes that they are but.....a Labour councillor...says there is frustration among Asian parents who cannot get their children into successful secondary schools which cater mainly for white pupils.”<sup>108</sup>

This raises another even more difficult question: why are these schools more successful, and would they continue to be successful if they changed their admissions policies?

The divisiveness charge was also levelled in an *Independent* leader article: ‘State schools should promote common values, not religious divisions’.<sup>109</sup> Responding directly to ‘Dearing’, which is described as “confused” and “muddled”, the writer also compared the English situation with that in Northern Ireland. S/he believed that “it is wrong in principle that pupils should be selected on grounds of their religion...” But, relating to the ‘difficult’ question which concluded the previous paragraph, the writer specifically referred to Dearing’s apparent suggestion (when interviewed) that even if the admission of “the poor” depressed exam results, schools should “take it on the chin, go for it and be brave”, and commented that it was “unfortunately idealistic and naïve....[because] if a school starts to drop in the league tables, many parents will start going to a different church to try to get their children into a less ‘brave’ school.” The writer concluded:

The better answer would be to prevent schools discriminating against pupils who do not subscribe – or pretend to subscribe – to a set of beliefs. If the church has a mission to the poor, it should be delivered to all the poor, regardless of cultural (*sic*) background.....Selection by nominal religion....has the potential to divide children along ethnic, cultural or class lines.

For Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society the matter was simple. Parents do not particularly want church schools, they just want good schools. Because church schools can use their admissions policies to select allegedly on grounds of faith, they

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>109</sup> *The Independent Newspaper* 15/6/01, p. 3.

actually select on grounds of class and motivation. That brings them their success: “faith has nothing to do with it.”<sup>110</sup>

It is clear that ‘Dearing’ had, through its ‘bullishness’, led to a revival of anti-church school polemic, not heard in such volume since the mid-1980s.<sup>111</sup> Apart from these immediate media responses, there were numerous letters during ensuing weeks in both the church and educational press. The following examples from the *Church Times*<sup>112</sup> provide something of their flavour:

Where church schools are oversubscribed, the record of churchgoing is too often adopted as the criterion for admissions....If church schools are to be at the forefront of the mission of the church, how will they erase the impression given of religion which such an admissions system suggests? [The Revd C Hall]

It has been my sad experience of over 25 years in Christian education to find that many church schools have been far from effective in proclaiming the gospel. I have often found both staff and parents displaying antipathy towards the church. [The Revd D Smith]

It is less surprising that the correspondence columns of the *TES* also contained trenchant criticisms:

Apparently, Canon John Hall wants church schools to serve the poor in the community. Maybe he could explain why our local Church of England high school [in Lancaster].....has fewer than 5 per cent of its pupils eligible for free school meals. [Tony Toubkin]<sup>113</sup>

While not wishing to lay the blame for recent disturbances in the North-west at the door of church schools, there is no doubt that the self-serving nature of these schools has played a part in keeping the children of these communities apart at a formative period in their lives. The proliferation of such schools can only make the situation worse. [Terry Sanderson]<sup>114</sup>

Other newspaper correspondence echoed the same ideas:

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<sup>110</sup> BBC News website [*news.bbc.co.uk*] 14/6/01.

<sup>111</sup> For a more sober and measured examination of the issues see Jackson R. (2001). pp. 5–6.

<sup>112</sup> 22/6/01.

<sup>113</sup> *TES* 29/6/01, p. 22.

<sup>114</sup> *TES* 20/7/01, p. 19.



[Faith schools] only serve to harden and intensify racial, cultural and religious divisions, and encourage an unhealthy ghetto mentality. Children should be protected from indoctrination and allowed to mix with children from different backgrounds, making friendships that will help erode bigotry and division. [Geoff Booth]<sup>115</sup>

Peter Wilby, editor of the *New Statesman*, argued<sup>116</sup> that the only reason for the success (and therefore popularity) – the “magic” – of CE schools was because they “attract (or select) the more affluent and/or the more supportive parents.” Wilby bemoans the apparently emerging practice of taking religion seriously:

The English [in contrast to Americans] take religion casually and lightly. If they go to church at all, they do so in the same spirit as they go to a theatre, an historic house or a nature trail; it is a perfectly pleasant way to occupy an hour or two, but nothing to get excited about....Our church schools tend to echo this relaxed view.

If they took religion seriously then “middle-class parents [would be] less inclined to send their children to them.” Nevertheless, he concludes: “I think the idea of encouraging more ‘faith schools’ is madness. More CE schools is code for more schools that offer exclusivity to the white middle classes.” Why not then establish schools for other Faiths? That “would risk taking racial and cultural divisions to a new and dangerous level.....I propose only that we treat religion as a private matter and keep it out of the public realm, which should unify, and not divide”.

Another article<sup>117</sup> was used to introduce the appositely timed publication of the British Humanist Association: *Religious Schools: the case against*.<sup>118</sup> The arguments had been trailed the previous week in a letter from the BHA’s Education Officer:

Everyone wants better schools, but few would want segregation on the grounds of religious belief, or could justify expansion of selective specialist and religious schools at the expense of others. Church and other religious schools benefit from selecting supportive parents and well-behaved, relatively prosperous pupils....<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *The Guardian*, 17/7/01.

<sup>116</sup> *TES* 20/7/01, ‘Church school “magic” is simply snobbery’, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup> Baggini J ‘The classroom should be a broad church’ *TES*, 13/7/01, p. 22.

<sup>118</sup> BHA (2001); the booklet is considered above.

<sup>119</sup> *TES* 6/7/01 p. 28.



It is entirely possible, despite the official reason given, that the delay in the publication of the DfES White Paper (due in July 2001) was indeed the result of the above furore (in the words of the *Church Times*' Education Correspondent, Margaret Holness):

...it is widely accepted that, in the wake of riots in Oldham and Bradford, where segregation in education has been cited as one of the problems, the Government feels that this is not the moment to focus on a programme of reform of which one element is the creation of more faith schools....however, both the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the Secretary of State for Education, Estelle Morris, publicly reiterated their support for church schools.<sup>120</sup>

In the same edition, a letter was published from John Kershaw, taking as its points of reference the then recently proposed redistribution of central church funds to dioceses, and the claim by the Diocesan Director of Education for Bradford Diocese (one of the 'losers' in the redistribution), in response to the divisiveness charges, that "in 60 Anglican primary schools [in Bradford]....95% of the pupils were Muslims of Asian origin." The writer asked: "...am I being naïve in asking what is the *raison d'être* for these schools?" In other words, why is the Church of England funding schools for Muslims? A stark rejection of the 'general/service' model.

The debate was set to run into the holidays. The August 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *TES* published three letters and a "summer debate" with the headline: "Is greater diversity healthy? Are the Government's plans to create more faith and specialist schools in everyone's best interests?".<sup>121</sup> Two of the letters were pro church schools, arguing respectively that those 'anti' are not people of different Faiths, but those who have a "vested interest" in opposing every Faith. Segregation, argued Joseph Sowerby, was to be found as much in community schools as anywhere else. The second (Andrew Bowdler) focused specifically on Wilby's previous article, attacking it on the basis that it used unreal stereotypes in its portrayal of Christians: "my experience of church schools is that they are successful because parents –

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<sup>120</sup> *Church Times* 20/7/01, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *TES* 3/8/01, p. 13.

from white middle-class or Asian and Caribbean working class – believe that they teach attitudes and standards of behaviour that have been lost in ordinary state schools.” Gillian Lee’s letter repeated the charge, with specific reference to Bradford, that church schools are divisive. As a taxpayer she did not appreciate funding schools from which her children are “barred from attending” because unlike (she claims) many other parents, she will not attend church just to gain a place. This summer debate added little to what had been said before. In fact, the arguments, despite the headline, focused more on specialist than faith schools.

A fortnight later came two more direct attacks. A letter headlined ‘Faith and the lessons of history’ again pressed the divisiveness point, in even more vigorous language: “Religion in practice generates and sustains the hatred of other religions.....in the past few hundred years, religion has played a predominantly negative role, increasing the sum total of human misery.....if we wish to Balkanise this country, multiplying single faith schools will be the surest and quickest way to do it.”<sup>122</sup> Perhaps most interesting was an article by Karen Thornton, headed “Young sceptics say faith schools breed racism.”<sup>123</sup> This was allegedly based on discussions with pupils organised by the charity ‘Save the Children’, and the conclusion reached was that “there was overwhelming opposition to single-faith schools” because children want to mix with pupils of other cultures, want to learn about different religions, and believe that if people of different religions did not mix, “there will be war between religions”. One pupil was quoted as saying: “I like all religions and faiths – this [more faith schools] will increase racism”. Leaving aside the fact that this supposedly meaningful critique was based on a sample of just 54 secondary and 65 primary pupils from Inner London, there was no suggestion that ‘Save the Children’ attempted to provide some basic facts (such as that being a faith school did not in itself prevent the study of other Faiths, or that individual religions themselves embraced a variety of cultures and

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<sup>122</sup> *TES* 17/8/01, p. 15, letter from Clive Delmonte.

<sup>123</sup> *TES* 17/8/01, p. 2.



ethnic groups), or to review the opposing arguments. This was a discussion based on ignorance, yet considered worthy of inclusion in the *TES* because it bolstered a case they wished to promote.

Perhaps the final short-term response (although with long-term implications) to Dearing was that of the Government itself. The Labour Government had made a number of public statements applauding the work of church schools, included a welcoming response to Dearing. On several occasions both Blunkett (Secretary of State for Education until May 2001) and Morris, his successor, said that they would welcome proposals to build more church schools. It was also made clear that the Government's forthcoming White Paper would underline that commitment. However, its publication, widely expected in July 2001, was delayed until September. There may have been a number of reasons for this, not least the lack of enthusiasm with which the proposal to expand the 'specialist school' sector was received by Labour supporters, but as the *Church Times* had already suggested, Ministers may also have felt the need to reflect on the wrath that had been poured onto 'Dearing'. Although the 'welcome' for additional 'faith schools' was in the White Paper, it was rather more muted than the pre-publication announcements might have led people to expect. In particular, there was a qualification: the only new Church of England schools which the Government would be prepared to countenance would be "inclusive",<sup>124</sup> and welcomed "the recommendation that Church of England schools should serve the whole community, not confining admission to Anglicans."

For the education correspondent (and the headline writer) of the *Church Times* there was no doubt of the feelings as schools returned to the new school year: "Church relieved as White Paper backs schools," adding that the Government had provided "unwavering

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<sup>124</sup> *Schools achieving success* DfES White Paper 5/9/01, para. 5.31, p. 45.



support” for faith schools.<sup>125</sup> The point was made somewhat defensively that “the overwhelming majority of Church of England primary schools....serve the local community,” implying (correctly) that was not the case in the secondary sector, but that this could be put right by the creation of more CE secondary schools along the lines recommended by Dearing.

At the beginning of October 2001, the *Church Times* continued the debate with three key articles<sup>126</sup> in its education supplement: John Hall reiterated his arguments for the “value of schools for other faiths”; Phil Willis set out the “case against faith ghettos”, while the Head of St Aidan’s CE High School, Harrogate, argued the “case for religious literacy”. For those who had followed the discussion thus far, there was little new here. Indeed, one gained the impression that certain stock arguments (particularly those set out by Willis) were now being ‘wheeled out’ for form’s sake – all, that is, except for arguments supportive of the ‘domestic/nurture’ function, over which a veil had been drawn.

Hall took the opportunity of contextualising his comments in the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy. He reported that at a conference of Heads and Governors in Liverpool he had expressed his fear of a “backlash against Muslims”, and that there was a similar backlash against the move for new faith schools. He claimed that because in order to understand this country and (thus?) be properly educated spiritually and morally, one had also to understand its Christian heritage. This (despite the National Curriculum?), he seemed to be arguing, could only properly be found in church schools: “...for Muslims or Jews or Sikhs, the best they can hope for, with at present a few exceptions and unless they are able to pay for it, is an education in a church school.” In one sweeping sentence he thus condemned the education provided by community schools as spiritually desolate! Hall went on to argue a case for faith schools for each Faith, so long as they are “genuinely inclusive”. He did not,

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<sup>125</sup> *Church Times* 7/9/01, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> *Church Times Education Supplement* 5/10/01 pp. 18 – 19.

however, bother to say why any such school should be inclusive – presumably he would not argue (for example) that Islam shares the Church of England’s ‘service to the community’ role? All he does is repeat the simple notion that “British society is strengthened and enriched by...diversity,” without considering the possibility that diversity might also be offered by more ‘exclusive’ faith schools.

While Richards does not go that far either, he certainly made a trenchant defence of church schools against their recent critics: “Parents who continue to be sceptical about a wholly secular morality long for their children to be part of a better world. Hypocrites they may be, but then so was the Prodigal Son, and look what the Father did for him!” He concluded: “Inclusiveness is an easy catch-phrase, and a useful stick with which to beat us. However, in our diversified system it cannot simply be left to church schools to make it work”. However, the battle was still being waged elsewhere. In the same edition of the *Church Times* it was reported that David Hart, the General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, had said that his union was “loud and clear against the expansion of faith schools. The events in Bradford and Oldham this summer make it clear that we have to support community schools. The best way ahead is to educate children from diverse ethnic backgrounds and different religions together....” Reference was also made to 11<sup>th</sup> September. Were church schools to be blamed for that as well?

By the autumn of 2001 the battle lines were drawn, as the *TES* front page headline made clear: ‘Faith school opposition multiplies’.<sup>127</sup> There were those urging the Government to scrap its plans (the article contained references to both 11<sup>th</sup> September and Northern Ireland), while Trevor Phillips (“leading black broadcaster and deputy chair of the Greater London Assembly”) was quoted as saying: “As long as Catholics, Anglicans and Jews have the right to create voluntary aided schools, it would be a crime to say Muslims

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<sup>127</sup> *TES* 5/10/01.



cannot”, so echoing Swann, though more trenchantly, from almost 20 years previously. The *TES* had previously reported that the Salvation Army was looking to open its own schools, and that a “mystery backer” was to fund a new Christian City Academy.<sup>128</sup>

So the argument now developing was that if the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church had their schools, then any religious group ought to have the same opportunity. If that could not be provided, then faith schools should go altogether. To add more bite to the debate research published by Dr John Marks, Director of Civitas (described by the *TES* as a “right-wing think tank”) reported that the claim that church schools did better than other schools was a sham – “the best church schools are very good.....while those at the other end can be as bad as the worst state schools,”<sup>129</sup> whilst a letter published in the *TES* enquired when it might be reported that parents have used the Human Rights Act to “challenge non-access to schools on grounds of religion”.<sup>130</sup> In fact, back in June, Hugo Sands had been reported as considering using the HRA on the basis that church schools “discriminate against those who aren’t regular church goers. And they’re state-funded, so where’s the justice in that?”<sup>131</sup> So faith schools should not be able to determine which pupils they take, simply because they are funded by the State. This again ignored the existence of Foundation schools, established by the Labour Government.

In fact the debate became a little surreal at the beginning of November 2001, possibly as a prelude to the General Synod debate on ‘Dearing’. In a two-page spread, the *TES*<sup>132</sup> compared two schools which stand next to each other in the Lancashire town of Accrington. On the one hand the community school, Moorhead, and on the other the CE school, St Christopher’s: the Moorhead photograph featured children at their breakfast club

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<sup>128</sup> *TES* 21/9/01, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *TES* Report 12/10/01 of *Faith in Education* Civitas.

<sup>130</sup> *TES* 19/10/01, p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 14/6/01.

<sup>132</sup> *TES* 2/11/01, pp. 6 – 7.



(caption: “special plea....70% of pupils have special needs”); the St Christopher photograph showed a child filling a chalice with wine (caption: “power of faith?”). Evidently the two schools were (and are) quite different, not least in their pupil intake, but the *TES* noted that Canon John Hall had “plunged into the [faith school] controversy” by comparing the superior standards at the church school with those of its counterpart. Indeed, Hall himself had inspired the article, when at a Royal Society of Arts debate he “held up St Christopher’s as a shining example of the value of faith schools..... ‘I can show you two schools next door to each other which are similar in many respects but one is a church school and one is a community school. The church school regularly outperforms the community school’.” Thus Hall set himself up as a hostage to fortune, for the *TES* wasted no time in sending its reporter to investigate in more detail. A simple comparative chart demonstrated that while only 12.5% of St Christopher’s pupils had SEN, 69.8% of Moorhead’s were so designated; 5% of St Christopher’s children were on free schools meals (one of the DfES’ benchmarks), as opposed to 33% at Moorhead; the average cognitive test score of pupils on entry to the former was 99, while at the latter only 91. In other words, the schools had significant differences in pupil intake: socio-economic background and ability. It was not so simple as the church school being better because it was a church school, and the General Secretary of the CE Board of Education had done the church school cause no favours in suggesting that. The article was neatly rounded off by a quotation from Marion Parsons, a Christian headteacher: “If Christ were alive today he would be out there in the Packington estate (in Islington) not setting up a school for the middle classes.”

Whilst this exchange was going on, the Local Government Association (LGA) published a report saying that new faith schools would be “potentially divisive”,<sup>133</sup> and that all schools should be socially inclusive and “provide for the religious and cultural needs of all

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<sup>133</sup> Reported in the *Church Times* 9/11/01 p. 5.

children”. The answer, it claimed, was to develop “multi-faith schools which in themselves offer a distinct ethos.”<sup>134</sup> It then demanded that only 25% of places at any new church school should be reserved for Christian families on the basis that “schools with around a quarter of their admissions based on religious beliefs would still be able to maintain a distinct faith-based ethos”).<sup>135</sup> The stage had been set, although not very productively, for the Synod debate.

The outcome was predictable; despite the *Church Times*’ education correspondent referring to it as the “final hurdle”<sup>136</sup> for the Dearing Report, there was never any danger that it would fall. The report had already received the blessing of the Archbishop’s Council, which had commissioned it. It had also received a secular ‘blessing’ in the Government’s Education White Paper, and through the presence of Estelle Morris, the new Secretary of State, who addressed the Synod on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November, the day before Synod debated the Report itself. In a long and wide ranging speech<sup>137</sup> Morris paid tribute to the Church of England’s role as a partner in the education service, and was particularly effusive in her praise for ‘Dearing’.

Morris set out clearly the Government’s inclusive agenda concerning ‘faith schools’, speaking of the “differentness” of a faith school, so underlining support for a diverse system, which is “rich” and needs celebrating. She referred to the confidence of church schools in upholding a clear “value[s] base”, and she then contextualised the whole of this by reference to the northern race riots and September 11<sup>th</sup>, and hence concerns about “the cohesiveness of society”. For her, the answer – indeed, the self-confessed “mantra” – was inclusiveness, interpreted microcosmically. For society to be whole, inclusiveness must operate on a school-by-school basis, and Morris stated that she was to issue new guidance

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<sup>134</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 6/11/01.

<sup>135</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 11/12/01.

<sup>136</sup> *Church Times* 23/11/01 p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Transcript provided by Colin Hopkins, Secretary to the Church Schools Review Group.



to School Organisation Committees that any new faith school would only be accepted if it was committed to an inclusive admissions policy (“or agreeing to work in partnership with other [schools] in the area”).<sup>138</sup>

This is where the analysis began to break down. Indeed, she recognised that education was only a part of the problem, which was also “about housing allocation, about urban policy, about employment; it’s a debate about discrimination.” However, if it is about all these things, then to focus on how individual schools operate (and such a small number at that) is hardly the most obvious way to address the problem, and to do so would inevitably undermine the diversity within the system as a whole. That diversity can only be maintained if difference is also maintained, for to make all schools inclusive, is not only to make all schools the same, but it is to weaken each school’s “differentness” and so its values base. Is it impossible, for example, for diverse schools, with different pupil populations, to work in harmony with each other? Indeed, it can be shown that some schools with diverse, rather than focused, pupil intakes find immense problems within the school community, as different social, or racial, or religious groups, come into conflict with each other.

Morris’ reference to a “parent’s *right* [my italics] to have a faith-based education for their child,” is of particular interest, because the law has never gone so far as to say that a parent has a right to any particular school, merely the right to express a preference. Of course, it is difficult to know precisely how she understood “a faith-based education”, but whatever else, it would certainly seem to embrace the concept of an educational context which reflects the beliefs and values of the home. That would seem to imply the necessity for exclusive rather than inclusive schools, for how could a particular values/beliefs context meet the needs of everyone, including those who do not accept those values or those

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<sup>138</sup> As reported in the *TES* 16/11/01 p. 2.



beliefs? Would a Christian, for example, be content to have their child educated in a context of Muslim beliefs and values? Would someone who has no religious beliefs either want or need an education based on the Christian faith? The notion was also embodied in one of Morris' responses shortly after the Synod debate at Education Questions in the Commons. Asked by Phil Willis whether she would accept that "no faith school in receipt of state funding should discriminate, in their admissions process, against children of other faiths and those with no faith," Morris responded that "it was reasonable to give preference to one faith if the school was over-subscribed...."<sup>139</sup> This concept was reiterated by an unnamed DfES spokesperson, who stated: "We want to encourage faith schools to take pupils of other beliefs but we cannot oblige them to do so, *nor would we want to*."<sup>140</sup> That was not to be the attitude of church civil servants.

Yet for Morris, the most pleasing aspect of 'Dearing' was "the emphasis that it placed on the principles of religious and social inclusiveness," an "approach to education is one founded on a notion of *inclusiveness rather than separation* [my italics] from the community," implying that the choice is either inclusiveness or separation. This is where the confusion between macrocosmic problems and microcosmic solutions is at its starkest. There would seem no *a priori* reason why separate schooling (on the basis of faith) should lead to separateness in society as a whole; nor is it inevitable that integrated schooling dissolves separateness within society. There are many schools where children of different social, racial and religious backgrounds mix during the day, only to go home to separate areas and cultures at the end of that day.

It was a powerful speech for a Minister of the Crown to make to Synod, for which Morris received a standing ovation, and was described by Lord Dearing as "courageous".<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 22/11/01.

<sup>140</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 11/12/01.

<sup>141</sup> *Church Times* 16/11/01, p. 1.

However, the speech added nothing of any substance to the debate, and merely perpetuated the lack of clarity. The following day Lord Dearing himself addressed the Synod, reminding them of the 1998 statement about church schools standing at the centre of the church's mission. His interpretation of that mission was as in the Report – church schools were there to serve the whole community regardless of faith, or lack of it. But their Christian ethos must be “as distinctive as lettering running through a stick of rock.”<sup>142</sup> What Lord Dearing did not address was how that distinctiveness could be combined with an inclusive admissions policy. A variety of supportive statements were made, including a congratulatory speech by the Bishop of Blackburn as Chairman of the Board of Education. The *Church Times* only reports one dissenting voice: that of Gordon Simmonds from Chelmsford Diocese who, in contrast to Estelle Morris, “thought the report was one of the worse he had ever read. It was outdated, repetitive, full of assertions and almost totally lacking in argument”. Nevertheless, the Synod took note of the Report, and an amended motion was “passed overwhelmingly”; or in the triumphant words of the National Society's Newsletter: “Synod hails *The Way ahead*”<sup>143</sup>. In fact there were “a few abstentions and one dissident”:<sup>144</sup>

Following the Synod debate the National Society organised six *The Way ahead* regional day conferences, advertised as being for headteachers, teachers, clergy, governors, teachers in training and teacher trainers. I attended the penultimate conference, held on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2002 in Manchester. Notes which I took throughout the day reveal that nothing new was said. However, when during question time, I raised the issue of ‘Dearing’ apparently supporting the ‘nurture’ model, the Bishop of Blackburn, chairing the meeting, responded by saying that my views were well-known, and not supported by the House of Bishops. He made no attempt to address the issue.

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<sup>142</sup> *Church Times* 23/11/01 ‘General Synod Supplement’, pp. 15–18; much of the description of the debate is taken from this source; it will be noted that the “stick of rock” analogy is taken almost directly from Dearing (2001) para 3.25, p. 15.

<sup>143</sup> *The National Society News* Issue 15, January 2002.

<sup>144</sup> Source: Colin Hopkins.



If anyone in the church thought that the Synod debate, and the Secretary of State's warm address, had brought the 'faith schools issue' to some kind of conclusion, they would have been sadly mistaken. Perhaps the Synod debate itself prompted the anti-faith school lobby, ably led by the *TES*, to renew its attack? On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2001 readers were greeted with the front-page headline: "Voters oppose expansion of faith schools"<sup>145</sup>. This was based on a MORI poll, sponsored by the *TES*, which found that nearly two in five of those canvassed opposed the expansion of "state-funded religious schools" (SFRS); only 25% supported it. However, the poll also found that just over a third support existing SFRSs, with 27% saying that they opposed them. Nevertheless the poll found that four out of five felt that SFRSs should be inclusive of all Faiths and none. Interestingly, however, the main reason given for having faith schools was "a desire for children to be educated in the same values and beliefs as their family" – again, here, we see the same illogicality found in Dearing and in Morris' speech, i.e. supposed support for a rationale that is based on receiving an education in a context reflecting the values and beliefs of the home, yet at the same time a call to have children educated in those schools where the homes do not share those values or beliefs.

One article focused on Yusuf Islam's (ex-pop star Cat Stevens) 3 Islamia schools in London. Although the schools are heavily oversubscribed by Muslim parents ("we have 2000 on our waiting list. Our parents can be extremely...vicious if we can't allow their children in"), Yusuf Islam was reported as saying that Muslim schools should take in local children of other or no Faiths (even though his do not). But why would non-Muslim parents want to send their children to a Muslim school? Another article quoted a Labour MP as saying of Government policy: "Before September 11<sup>th</sup> it looked like a bad idea; it now looks like a mad idea." 'Weaving a rainbow' by William Kay,<sup>146</sup> painted an apocalyptic picture whereby the continuation of 'nurture' schools causes the fragmentation

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<sup>145</sup> *TES* 30/11/01; main articles on pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.



of society: “children are hermetically sealed within ghettos. Communities become hostile to each other. There is hatred between social classes....We have an image of South Africa under apartheid.” The solution? Simply to ensure that in each faith-based school a third of the places are reserved for non-Faith members. Again, bearing in mind that the vast majority of CE primary schools are community focused, and that there are only just over 100 CE VA secondaries in England and Wales, one has to wonder where the sense of perspective had gone. It was interesting therefore to read a letter written by the Head of a Muslim school in Leicestershire,<sup>147</sup> who pointed out that the ghettos referred to already exist, and are to be found in areas “served by predominantly non-faith schools”. Do people, he argued, “not realise that minority groups tend to live where their places of worship are, and so tend to live together, regardless of whether or not they have faith schools”. Society would be served by an increase in faith schools, “because young people have a shortage of faith in their education, not the reverse.” This view was supported by Iftikhar Ahmad from the London School of Islamic Trusts, who, when writing about the “extraordinary proposal” to establish a multi-Faith foundation secondary school, argued that “Multi-Faith schools are not going to bring together children from different faiths. State schools are already multi-cultural and multi-racial, but relations between different communities have gone from bad to worse in the past 30 years,” and added: “The silent majority of Muslim parents would like to see their children attending Muslim schools.”<sup>148</sup> This was unqualified support for the ‘nurture’ model, and a rejection of a multi-Faith model by Muslim educational professionals.

December 2001 saw the publication of the Cantle Report, together with other detailed reports on Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, sponsored by the Government. Although Cantle quite properly made the point that mono-culturalism was not confined to faith schools, it

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<sup>147</sup> Published in the *TES* 7/12/01 p. 22.

<sup>148</sup> *TES* 2/8/02, p. 14.

did not prevent him recommending that faith schools should reserve 25% of their places for children of other Faiths and of none. However:

Rather than reject faith community schools the Cantle Report assumes that the enhancement of social cohesion can be achieved within the current dual system of local community and faith-based schools.<sup>149</sup>

Nevertheless, the significance of these reports for the Church of England was that they seemed to push church leaders into making strong ‘partisan’ statements: were these simply knee-jerk reactions by bishops and other church leaders, or did they provide the excuse to propose policies which would never have been put forward otherwise?

First, the Bishop of Blackburn, Chairman of the Board of Education stated: “The Church of England is as concerned as Mr Cantle that some faith schools appear to be operating discriminatory policies where religious affiliations protect cultural and ethnic divisions,”<sup>150</sup> thus failing to recognise that there is a cultural and ethnic mix within religious Faiths, particularly Christianity. It is, perhaps, puzzling why the Bishop neglected to repeat his claim, and that of Dr Rowan Williams (made in the Hockerill Lecture, given just a month earlier) that church schools were not divisive. However, the Bishop stopped short – at least at that stage – of declaring that church schools must admit children of other Faiths and none; rather, he stated that he “would encourage” church schools to take the Board’s inclusive policy into account.

Canon John Hall was not as shy as his Chairman; neither was the *TES*: “Race report attacks segregated schooling: The authors of the Cantle race riots review and *C of E leaders agree: schools should be forced to be multi-cultural*” was the triumphant headline.<sup>151</sup> Hall was specifically quoted as saying that “We are wondering whether diocesan authorities should

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<sup>149</sup> Wright, A. (2003a). p. 151.

<sup>150</sup> Reported in the *Church Times* 14/12/01, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> *TES* 14/12/01 p. 3, my italics.



be given some power to require governing bodies to change their [admissions] policies". There had been no consultation on this. It did signal, however, that the CE Board of Education was now thoroughly wedded to Government policy on 'inclusion'. An arguably more measured approach was taken by the Roman Catholic Church. The Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham, and Chairman of the Catholic Schools Commission (also Observer on the Dearing Review Group) warned against "ignoring religious belief in the quest for a tolerant society."<sup>152</sup> Religious belief was not abstract; it had to be lived out in particular ways, and therefore "the education provided by schools of different faiths will be distinctive." No school, he pointed out, was "truly inclusive at the point of entry." They should be inclusive, but that inclusiveness was to be found in many forms, "not least by the school's participation in the life of the wider community, co-operating with other schools of a different ilk." Implied here is the notion that inclusion within society can be achieved with faith schools taking children just from their own Faiths. However, this insight, tucked away on the inside pages, was overshadowed by a *TES* coup.

The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote an article proclaimed with banner headlines: "Archbishop opposes all-Christian schools".<sup>153</sup> Heads and governors of all-Christian CE schools (primary and secondary) will have been deeply dismayed; other heads and governors will have been disturbed by this break with the tradition that the church officially affirmed all its schools – even its fee-paying schools. Even the Bishop of Blackburn in his Hockerill Lecture recognised that there were "different emphases according to local need and circumstances....and the church would be unwise (and indeed un-Anglican) to go for one definition or model for a church school".<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *TES* 11/1/02, p. 8.

<sup>153</sup> *TES* 11/1/02, p. 1; Archbishop's article p. 17.

<sup>154</sup> Chesters (2001) p. 5.



I wrote immediately to the Archbishop expressing this concern about an apparent policy U-turn:

I am sure that you regret, as do I, that one sentence in your article in today's TES has been translated into a front page headline.....But the fact is, it has; and as the Head of an all-Christian CE school I wonder quite where that leaves us.....I would value....your personal action to seek to undo the damage inevitably done by the TES headline.<sup>155</sup>

Almost three weeks later I received a reply from the Archbishop's Secretary for Public Affairs<sup>156</sup> which simply reiterated the Archbishop's view, specifically stating the "Archbishop's support for the proposals made by Lord Dearing's group". Other correspondence followed, but the Archbishop clearly had no intention to do anything to correct the impression that he somehow deplored certain kinds of CE school.

The introductory article began:

Popular Church of England schools should take in pupils of other faiths or none, even if they have to turn away the children of practising Christians, the Archbishop of Canterbury believes.

But what the Archbishop had actually written about was quite different: its title was 'Keep faith with RE study',<sup>157</sup> and the thrust of the article was: "All post-14 students should continue taking religious lessons". The article, contrary to the *TES* 'spin' was not about church schools, it was about RE. In fact, the first mention of "church and other faith schools" came in the penultimate paragraph (of seven), where the issue is church/faith schools playing "their full part in promoting understanding and respect across the communities they serve and help to shape." It was in this context that the Archbishop wrote:

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<sup>155</sup> Letter 11/1/02.

<sup>156</sup> Letter 28/1/02.

<sup>157</sup> *TES* 11/1/02, p. 17.

The Church of England is clear that our schools should be distinctively Christian in ethos and inclusive in approach. Almost all Church of England schools already include pupils of other denominations and faiths and of no particular religious faith. They nurture Christian children in their faith, encourage those of other faiths and challenge those of no faith. That inclusiveness is particularly true of our primary schools.....[but our secondary schools] should include some children of other faiths and of no particular faith as well as the children of Christian families.

So the Archbishop became yet another hostage to fortune (Frank Dobson was to name him in support of his motion to make inclusion compulsory),<sup>158</sup> and it is difficult to understand why he did not feel able to publicly disown the headline as being unrepresentative of the article it proclaimed.

If one were to analyse what the Archbishop actually wrote, then one would see that it differs little from 'Dearing' or from the Hockerill Lecture, even to the point of being less than clear as to whether the 'twin focus' (service/nurture) should be delivered by the whole sector, or by individual schools. What was equally lacking was any indication that there might be a rationale to back up the assertions made, together with a failure even to recognise that there might be a question as to how distinctiveness and inclusion could be combined. The Archbishop simply repeats the words of his predecessor Robert Runcie, quoted in the Dearing Report, as though mere repetition assures meaningfulness.

It is difficult to know whether CE policy on its schools was now officially being firmed up in a particular direction (towards enforcing the inclusive model), or whether the various statements being made were simply lacking any considered thought. The Chairman of the Board of Education had only recently affirmed that it would be "unAnglican" and "unwise" to deny that there could be different models of church school, yet the Archbishop of Canterbury was clearly unwilling to say or do anything to deny that he opposed "all-Christian" schools. By mid-January 2002, the pre-Christmas reflections about whether or

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<sup>158</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 4/2/02.



not to push schools into inclusive admissions policies seemed to be hardening, and it was becoming clear that whatever the Bishop of Blackburn had said about a mixed economy of CE schools, his General Secretary was determined to see just the one 'inclusive' model prevail.

So a front-page article in the *Church Times* appeared under the headline: "School gates to open wider".<sup>159</sup> Diocesan authorities were to be "given stronger powers to make church schools more inclusive....One consequence might be that fewer church school places are available for the children of Christian parents." The reason for this was judged to be that "education officials in the church are sensitive to the criticism that faith schools are divisive, made with increasing force" since the Dearing Report. The method to be used was to ask the Government to amend the 1991 Diocesan Boards of Education (DBE) Measure to make it a duty for church school governors not simply to consult dioceses on their admissions policies, but to "have regard" to the Diocesan view. The writer pointed out that "it is unclear exactly what might happen to a church school that refused to heed diocesan advice". The report also stated that the Archbishop of Canterbury's views expressed the previous week in the *TES* had been supported by a unanimous statement from the House of Bishops: "Through *each* of its 4,700 schools the Church of England is strongly committed to serving the whole community from a distinctively Christian standpoint. Historically, Church of England schools have been a service to the nation's children, and this requires them to be inclusive in admissions, as most already are". The italicised "each" seems to be the first official indication that the 'twin focus' was not simply to be systemic. It is not immediately apparent what force is to be given to "requires". Were 'all-Christian' schools going to be compelled to become inclusive?

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<sup>159</sup> *Church Times* 18/1/02



There were two interesting developments around this time, which seemed to presage what was to come. Firstly the beginnings of a reaction against the ‘party line’, and secondly the attempt to give those individuals involved in pushing the inclusive line a higher personal profile. The former may be illustrated by a letter from the ex-Head of a London CE secondary school, given the heading: “Must the church starve its own.”<sup>160</sup> Peter Inson wrote that forcing through a mandatory inclusive policy would be “a very perilous undertaking. Church schools’ very existence results from the moral and practical imperatives of parenthood, not from political or government concern. It is one thing to encourage neighbourly virtue, it is another thing to compel it.” A small article in the same edition of the *TES*<sup>161</sup> reported a poll held on the *Church Times*’ website (interestingly not reported by the *Church Times* itself) where 90% of 400 readers had indicated that they believed that places at CE schools ought to be reserved for practising church families. Another indicator was the willingness of the *Church Times* to publish my own article: ‘Hold on – we want our schools to be exclusive’,<sup>162</sup> which generated some supportive correspondence (as did a BBC2 *Newsnight* film about Canon Slade School broadcast on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2002).

Also on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2002 the *TES*<sup>163</sup> gave a half page profile of Canon John Hall, who was feted as the church’s “Rev Fix-It” and (quoting the Bishop of Blackburn) “a mover and a shaker”. Hall “described as a smooth operator, with acute political antennae...is not shy of the glare of the media”. It was also suggested that he had ambitions “for purple.” Equally ‘canonised’ by the *TES*<sup>164</sup> was Phil Willis, the Liberal Democrat Education Spokesman: he “may be seen as the arch enemy of faith schools but he is actually deeply religious”.

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<sup>160</sup> *TES* 25/1/02, p. 22.

<sup>161</sup> 25/1/02, p. 13.

<sup>162</sup> *Church Times* 8/2/02, p. 19.

<sup>163</sup> p. 7.

<sup>164</sup> 25/1/02, p. 12.

But the full attack on faith schools was to come from a different political direction. The former Health Secretary, Frank Dobson, proposed an amendment to the Education Bill that would force any new faith school to take 25% of its pupils from other Faiths or none. However the amendment failed (although 45 Labour MPs voted for it), after a 6 hour debate, held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2002. In opposing the amendment Paul Goggins criticised a proposal which would mean “Jewish children would be turned away from Jewish schools,” while the Secretary of State argued that the setting of quotas would scapegoat faith schools for problems which were generated by society rather than by the education system,<sup>165</sup> and she made a clear statement distinguishing CE from other faith schools:

The Roman Catholic Church, and parts of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, think that they keep their faith base in their schools because most of the people in them practise that faith. That is not true of the Church of England...It believes that its faith-value base can offer a good education for children of different faiths. I respect those views.<sup>166</sup>

This gave clear approval to what was now seen as formal CE policy, although there was no recognition that this was actually not the policy in many individual CE schools, nor more importantly, was there any indication that the Secretary of State understood why there should be this difference between the CE and other denominations or Faiths.

Two days after the Commons debate, two interesting pieces were published in the *TES*.<sup>167</sup> One reported a response to the general debate from the Roman Catholic Church saying (as the headline put it) “We’re too poor to be inclusive”. To offer places to non-Catholics would mean building more schools, and there were no funds to do this. The Director of the Catholic Education Service, Oona Stannard, was quoted as saying: “Rejecting even more Catholics from the places they have funded and nurtured over so many years would cause considerable pain.” The second report related to the only mixed-sex state Muslim school in

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<sup>165</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 7/2/02.

<sup>166</sup> Reported in the *Church Times* 15/2/02.

<sup>167</sup> *TES* 8/2/02, p. 6.



the UK, the Al-Hijrah school. Here it was judged to be “impractical” to take a quota of children of other Faiths, and the school saw its role as providing a Muslim-based education for children over a wide area of Birmingham. Furthermore, Abdullah Trevathan, Head of an Islamic school in London, argued that increasing the number of state-funded single faith schools could prevent the recurrence of race riots, because VA Muslim schools could provide Muslim youngsters with the self-esteem they needed, so negating the need to riot. After all, he argued, “the boys who were rioting in Bradford are coming out of schools from the state system,” and in the end “people wish to have their own culture and religious identity reflected within the education system.”<sup>168</sup> In fact, as the year progressed, it became clear that others were declining to treat the various reports on the race riots as beyond criticism. Representatives of Oldham Council went so far as to claim that the riots were not about race at all, but about poverty and deprivation: the Deputy Leader of Oldham Council was quoted<sup>169</sup> as saying: “These things must be solved but the way they will not be solved is by telling people that they must live in house A or must not live in house B – it simply would not work.”

However, by March 2002, it appeared to a clearly disappointed journalist, under the headline “Blair ensures triumph of faith”,<sup>170</sup> that the churches had won the debate. They had had “extraordinary success...in promoting their interests in education during the past half century,” because of the importance to governments of the middle-class voter. The reporter suggested that the CE had actually ‘done a deal’ with the Government, in that the outcome of the Dearing Review had been “cleared in advance with ministers”, and “part of the deal was that church schools would take pupils from different background.” This brought a fierce riposte from Lord Dearing himself<sup>171</sup> who categorically denied that there was any such deal. However, the continuing drama took an interesting twist when it

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<sup>168</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 6/2/02.

<sup>169</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 19/3/02.

<sup>170</sup> *TES* 1/3/02, p. 11.

<sup>171</sup> *TES* 15/3/02, Letters, p. 25.



transpired that as a cost-cutting exercise the Church of England was planning to cut the post of National Schools Development Officer (a post held by Colin Hopkins, Secretary to the Dearing Review Group). The brief could be “picked up by other Board of Education staff, and by the dioceses”.<sup>172</sup> Lord Dearing himself was quoted as being “surprised and disappointed”, while “insiders” were quoted as saying: “It seems bizarre....” and “It is absolutely mad....”<sup>173</sup> Even though a week later the CE announced that the post had been saved, it may be that even considering axing it was itself evidence of the lack of joined-up thinking at the highest levels of the Church of England.

In the meantime it began to be clear that the church had no intention of addressing the evident discrepancy of view between the Chairman (multi-model, ‘wise’ and ‘Anglican’) and the General Secretary (single inclusive model – presumably “unwise” and “un-Anglican”) of its Board of Education. Their approach seemed to be based on the notion that if the call for the ‘inclusive’ policy was repeated often and loudly enough, then that would prevail. It was at this point that this researcher became the subject of his research! I was not prepared to allow this significant discrepancy to be ignored, and I wrote to the *TES*, which had once again<sup>174</sup> reported Hall’s determination for the DBE Measure to be amended, adding the warning that any governing body which refused to follow the DBE’s advice might be referred to the Secretary of State: “no doubt”, Hall was quoted as saying, “she would take into account the advice of the diocese”, and by implication, compel the Governing Body to comply. My letter<sup>175</sup> quoted the two paragraphs from ‘Dearing’ affirming the nurture model, and the passage from the Hockerill Lecture affirming a multi-model approach. Referring to the General Secretary’s clear denial of both, I asked what the CE policy actually was, and suggested:

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<sup>172</sup> *Church Times* 19/4/02, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> *TES* 19/4/02, p. 15.

<sup>174</sup> *TES* 3/5/02, p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> *TES* 17/5/02, p. 25.

If Canon Hall is seeking to impose an inclusive one-fit-all admissions policy...then perhaps Bishop Chesters ought to consider the implications of having an 'un-Anglican' and 'unwise' general secretary of his board, and take appropriate action.

There were three outcomes. A response from Hall<sup>176</sup> confirmed that CE advice "will tend towards an inclusive approach," while claiming that he and the Bishop of Blackburn spoke as one. Yet he signally failed to address the discrepancy, seeming not to recognise that the inclusive model excluded the single 'nurture' model, which was allowed by the Bishop's multi-model approach. There followed a request from the *TES* to do a profile on me, which was then published<sup>177</sup> rather more as a personal attack (containing many factual inaccuracies), than any examination of my arguments. I actually received an e-mail<sup>178</sup> from the writer, Caroline Hendrie, disowning the article, which had been subject to such intrusive editing. I was then denounced by the Bishop of Blackburn in the House of Lords, where he complained that I was "trying to drive a wedge between"<sup>179</sup> him and Hall. In a private letter,<sup>180</sup> he also took me to task for writing to the *TES*, "a secular journal not known for its support of the church's engagement in schools". He seemed to forget that this was the very newspaper for which the Archbishop of Canterbury had written, and through which Hall had sought to lay down the rules for church schools.

The main issue remained unresolved: was it the CE's policy to allow different models of church school, including the 'nurture' model, or was there to be one undifferentiated 'twin focus' model applying to every school, whereby inclusive admissions policies would be obligatory? The perception was not simply mine that the issues were being deliberately blurred, because the senior CE figures involved actually recognised that they had no clear rationale for the position that they had taken, and because they could see that their own

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<sup>176</sup> *TES* 24/5/02, p. 25.

<sup>177</sup> *TES* 24/5/02, p. 8.

<sup>178</sup> Dated 27/5/02.

<sup>179</sup> House of Lords *Hansard* for 23/5/02 via [www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk](http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk).

<sup>180</sup> 31/5/02.



confusion regarding the issues was entering public consciousness. Back in September 2001, I had received an e-mail from an academic at Liverpool Hope University stating:

Having listened to an address by Canon John Hall to a conference of CE Heads at Hope yesterday, I believe that the church is being deliberately uncritical in order to maintain its nominal influence in education. Genuine critical reflection on the role of the church school would, I believe, result in a drop in the numbers of church schools, not the expansion that is being proposed.<sup>181</sup>

A further e-mail<sup>182</sup> suggested, regarding the same conference, that Hall had “responded to difficult questions....by invoking the need for wisdom. Whilst wisdom is indeed essential in dealing with the many issues that arise in schools, I felt that, in this case, it was being invoked in the absence of any real debate.”

Whatever the reason, the issue could not simply be left unresolved. I therefore wrote to the *Church Times*<sup>183</sup> asking directly for clarification of the issue. No public answer was given, although in a further private letter<sup>184</sup> the Bishop of Blackburn wrote:

...the policy of the Church of England for its schools is that set out in the Dearing Report. That has been affirmed by the General Synod, the House of Bishops, the Archbishop of Canterbury and, repeatedly, by me in the House of Lords, the Synod and in numerous speeches. Our schools should be distinctively Christian and seek to be inclusive.

Once again, there was no recognition of the argument that inclusiveness might dilute, or even destroy, distinctiveness; and there was no actual answer to the central questions: if (as stated by the Bishop himself) CE policy had been, and should continue to be, for a ‘mixed economy’ of different models, why was the CE pushing for a single ‘inclusive’ model, and what – apart from simply repeating that it was to be found in ‘Dearing’ – was the rationale?

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<sup>181</sup> E-mail from Mark Hamill, 13/9/01.

<sup>182</sup> Hamill, 17/9/01.

<sup>183</sup> *Church Times* 7/6/02, p. 11.

<sup>184</sup> 18/6/02.



Nevertheless, despite this, the 'Dearing' juggernaut was on the road, not to be stopped by anything as apparently trivial as a lack of any coherent rationale. In September 2002 three former community schools became CE VA schools, and were seen to be "a significant step in fulfilling the vision of the Dearing Report."<sup>185</sup> Hall was quoted as saying that the schools would not "turn away local children without religious commitment."<sup>186</sup> At the same time a new VC school rose in Newcastle from the ashes of two former 'fresh start' schools.<sup>187</sup>

Many CE school heads were surprised to read in October that, not only was the Government to ban the longstanding right of denominational schools to interview as part of their admissions process, but that the move had "the backing of the [CE] Board of Education and the Catholic Education Service."<sup>188</sup> Yet again the church had not attempted to consult with schools which did use the admissions interview. Bearing in mind that the interview could only be used to test denominational allegiance, then this could only be interpreted as seeking to weaken selection on denominational grounds.<sup>189</sup> This desire for greater central control over admissions was confirmed by the publication of Guidance on Admissions by the Board of Education.<sup>190</sup> The Guidance was said to reflect "the national policy of the Church of England as agreed by the General Synod, Archbishops' Council and House of Bishops." Never before had the CE been so clear about its policy on church schools. The publication of the Guidance coincided with the Government laying its draft Admissions Code of Practice (to which reference has already been made) before Parliament.

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<sup>185</sup> *Church Times* 6/9/02, p. 5.

<sup>186</sup> *TES* 13/9/02.

<sup>187</sup> *TES* 8/11/02 'Now All Saints is the talk of the town', p. 19.

<sup>188</sup> *Church Times* 11/10/02 p. 4.

<sup>189</sup> As I pointed out in a letter to the *TES*, 11/10/02, and was confirmed in a later article: "The move will anger some schools, which see interviews as a key way of maintaining their religious ethos" *TES* 22/11/02, p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Weekly e-mail to DDEs and Heads from Church House, Westminster, 15/11/02; such a centralising tendency may also be illustrated by proposals from the Manchester Diocesan Board of Education to take over the appointment of many more Governors: Document issued November 2003.

The CE Guidance rehearsed the practice of the general/service and domestic/nurture foci, making specific reference to 'Dearing'. It then completely disregarded those passages in Dearing which supported the nurture school and the tradition of affirming the twin focus across the system, and stated categorically: "All church schools should reserve some places for children of other Faiths and/or the local community, as apposite to local circumstances."<sup>191</sup> Now it was official. The nurture school is contrary to CE policy.

As this particular phase of the church schools debate came to an end, there were two incidents which seemed to confirm that there was yet more to be said, and that those who were concerned about where the Church of England had placed itself may indeed have had good reason to be so. Firstly, an attempt to establish the country's first formally multi-Faith school in London, for Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Hindu pupils

....floundered over the practical difficulties of providing distinctive schooling for pupils from four religions on one site....dashing the hopes of those who believed the secondary could become a flagship of inclusive faith-based education.<sup>192</sup>

Westminster Council claimed that there had been disagreements over how pupils of different religions and sexes were to be organised for lessons; a particular difficulty was the Muslim desire for single-sex teaching. Further evidence that a Faith-based education implies the need to take the beliefs and values of individual Faiths seriously. Secondly, many were surprised to see what seemed to be a falling-out between the CE and the Government. Following a series of problems in the summer and autumn of 2002, Morris had resigned her post, and was replaced by Charles Clarke. In an interview with the *Sunday Times*<sup>193</sup> Clarke had stated that he intended to clamp down on church schools that "wheel in their vicar to advise on admissions." Hall hurriedly sought to point out that the vicar may well be a member of the Governing Body which, as its own admissions

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<sup>191</sup> CE Board of Education, *National Guidance to Diocesan Boards of Education on Admissions to Church of England Schools* 14<sup>th</sup> November 2002.

<sup>192</sup> *TES* 6/12/02.

<sup>193</sup> 26/1/03.



authority, was entitled to set its own admissions policy. Having very much been in tune with Clarke's predecessors, Hall may have experienced only the first indication that not all Labour Secretaries of State were positive about church schools, and that an erastian ecclesiology in the modern world is unwise. In establishing a position because it was acceptable to the Government of the day, rather than because there was either a theological or ecclesiological rationale for doing so, the CE had made itself a hostage to fortune.

So despite the suggestion made in the *TES* that the churches had won the church schools debate it was clear that the matter was not so simple. A host of questions had been raised by the publication of the Dearing Report, and brought (again) to public consciousness, but the Report itself had provided little analysis of the issues, and so was able to offer few convincing answers. If the question were to be asked: 'has the Church of England at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a clear idea as to why it still has a significant investment in the provision of State education?' then although it is possible to find a reasonably clear answer in both the Dearing Report, and in the view of the (recently styled) 'Chief Education Officer' of the Church of England, John Hall, it is in those answers that the unresolved issues are highlighted, implicitly in the first case, and explicitly in the second, and then ignored:

.....with the state being a willing provider of education, the justification for the church's presence in education must be to offer an approach to education that is distinctively Christian.<sup>194</sup>

The church intends that its schools offer distinctively Christian education and are open and inclusive of all who seek such an education.<sup>195</sup>

The point is this: who is this "distinctively Christian" education for? Hall would offer it simply for those who want it.

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<sup>194</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 4.1, p. 19.

<sup>195</sup> *TES* 7/9/01, p. 15.



But is it the role of the church to provide schools for families that simply want a ‘good school’, or who, negatively, want a ‘white school’ or one where the ‘children aren’t common’; or for those who see the provision of Christian nurture by schools as meaning that the family need not bother? Would it not be better for a Muslim child to attend a Muslim VA school, one which is genuinely able to celebrate their own Faith, and to deliver an education from a context which is familiar? Surely the only proper purpose for wanting a Christian education is because that particular context for the delivery of education is one that is consonant with the beliefs and values of the family? Even ‘Dearing’ recognises that as a valid reason for having church schools,<sup>196</sup> although the principle was hardly examined further.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, therefore, it would seem that a major initiative by the Church of England which sought to clarify the purpose of its schools has left many central issues unexamined, and so many questions unanswered, although there is little recognition of this within the church in general, and among its education officers in particular. The way the Final Report was received would suggest that the Church of England formally believes that the purpose of its schools is now clear, and all that remains is to create yet more of them. It is even possible officials recognise that further debate will reveal that the Emperor is actually wearing no clothes. It may simply be the case that they had not sufficiently thought through the issues – particularly the ecclesiological issues, or are concerned that such questioning will not provide any comfortable answers.

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<sup>196</sup> Dearing (2001) para 3.19, p. 13.

## Chapter 8: Towards an Ecclesiology for Church of England Secondary Schools.

The argument undergirding this thesis is that there is a mutuality between how one understands the nature of the Church of England and of the purpose of CE schools. The latter depends on the former, whilst the former is inevitably expressed through the operation of the latter. It has been further argued that the purpose of a church school – its *raison d'être* – is itself expressed through the policy by which it admits pupils. Therefore the admissions policy of any church school will have ecclesiological as well as theological implications.

Whether a school governing body wants to give priority to Christian families, or whether it seeks to serve a geographical community, that decision should be informed by the nature of the church of which the school is part. It is equally important that the church itself, through its organs of government, shows a similar awareness of the ecclesiological issues when seeking to develop policies relating to its involvement in education.

Unfortunately, the debate that developed through the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – the seminal documents being the Durham and Waddington Reports, culminating in the Dearing Report of 2001 – and the involvement of the church's 'education officers' has not shown much ecclesiological thinking at all, and there is little indication either in the empirical research that Governing Bodies have considered anything much beyond the specific context in which their schools are operating, and the practical problems they are facing.

It has been argued in particular that the much celebrated 'Dearing Review' has failed to provide a coherent rationale for CE schools, and has actually encouraged the church



leadership to betray what was at least an implicit policy – the ‘mixed economy’ of schools – in order to push for a monolithic ‘inclusive’ system, which reflects more political, than either theological or ecclesiological, motives. Where explicit theology has been cited, it has tended to be both selective and simplistic: the purpose of CE schools is to take over the evangelistic task in which parishes have failed; the reason why the church must continue to be involved in education is to build on the traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and so on. There was also a lack of clarity in ‘Dearing’ on a number of signal issues: should the ‘twin focus’ be located within the system (as had been the traditional, if informal, policy) or in each individual school (thus ignoring what was actually happening in CE secondary schools)? Is there a rationale for both the ‘service’ model and the ‘nurture’ model? – both are clearly affirmed, but the latter is then hedged round with so many caveats, that it has allowed CE education officials to infer (at the very least) that the ‘service’ model is standard (as indeed it is in the primary sector). There has also been a culpable failure to consider whether the two models can co-exist; the question ‘will not inclusivism dilute distinctiveness?’ seems to have been actively avoided by those in authority (despite being raised by one of the most prolific church school researchers, Leslie Francis). Most crucial, of course, is whether ‘Dearing’ has provided a coherent rationale for the ‘service’ model at all. This thesis accepts that service is a Christian imperative; what it does not accept is the argument that Christian service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – particularly at a time when the church can barely afford to fund its crucial parochial ministry – should involve making educational provision for the general, and generally affluent, population (if schools, why not hospitals or prisons?) which is already made by the State. Neither should it be forgotten that the bulk of the funding of Faith schools is provided by the State.

Undergirding this whole debate is the basic question: ‘what is the Church of England?’ It would appear logical that the only basis for any institution outside of the State providing education for all, is a real and meaningful role in the nation as a whole. It has been



questioned whether any such role – beyond the ceremonial - can be said to exist today, when the Church of England is – to all intents and purposes, and despite Establishment – as much a denomination as any other church in England. It has also been argued that we live in a post-Christian society, where formal religion impinges little on the lives of most people. In such a society ‘evangelism on the rates’ (for which ‘Dearing’ asks) would seem both immoral and politically unacceptable. If the CE is a denomination, then its schools ought to be denominational, or even multi-denominational, i.e. ecumenical. It is actually argued that the single-Faith model (the ‘nurture’ model) – based on the principle that the values context for the delivery of education ought to reflect the beliefs and values of the home - provides the only defensible rationale for Faith schools.

I have already indicated that a coherent definition of church membership is crucial, and that CE policy on baptism, differentiated as it is in theology and practice, makes a useful comparator with church school admissions policies. This is because the way children are admitted to membership of the church, just as they are admitted to membership of a church school, will say a great deal about what the church believes itself to be. It has been argued that virtually indiscriminate baptismal policies make neither theological nor ecclesiological sense. On the one hand it provides something that most people in post-Christian Britain do not really want, i.e. membership of the church, while on the other hand it makes the concept of Christian affiliation virtually meaningless.

Whereas Karl Rahner saw members of other Faiths as “anonymous Christians”,<sup>1</sup> so a ‘church of the nation’ ecclesiology seems to see the English as ‘anonymous Anglicans’. It may be thought that such a view demeans the notion of what it means (particularly what it means *today*) to be a Christian i.e. it is poor theology; and to identify the Church of England with a fundamentally secular nation trivialises the concept of the church i.e. it is

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<sup>1</sup> Rahner K (1974) p. 395; summarised discussion of the issues in Rahner (1978) pp. 311–321.

poor ecclesiology. Furthermore, the suggestion that the church (or the church school) has an imperative to place a ministry of welcome (to church or school) over and above anything else, may be seen to be putting the cart before the horse. Of course, Christians must go out and proclaim the good news,<sup>2</sup> and welcome all those who respond to it, but not in a way that emphasises its benefits, yet ignores its demands.

Of course, any ecclesiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires both a clear and accurate historical perspective, as well as a grasp of the present situation in which the church in England finds itself. The Dearing Report, which placed so much store on its examination of history, made a number of fundamental misjudgements about the motivations of founders of CE schools, and those whom the schools were supposed to serve. Similarly, it would appear that the present leadership of the Church of England also prefers to live in the past, even though their assessment of the past – a church which really embraced the whole nation - is often seen through rose-tinted spectacles. Both sociological indicators and cultural analysis make it clear that the Church of England is broadly irrelevant to most people. However, the leadership of the church identifies itself so wholeheartedly with current political orthodoxy, that the only sin left today is the sin of exclusion.

The church formally states that its schools must be inclusive, and also distinctively Christian. No attempt is made to show whether the two are compatible, and this research has pointed up the difficulties where that attempt has been made. Furthermore, the church has failed to explore with sufficient rigour the concept of a ‘Christian school’. Who or what is it that makes any community ‘Christian’? A school with 100% Muslim intake may be a church school, but is it in any meaningful sense a ‘Christian school’? Some might claim that it is enough for it to be a school with a Christian foundation. It has been the argument of this thesis, however, that a Christian community can only be a community of

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<sup>2</sup> *Matthew 28: 19-20: the requirement to make disciples includes teaching them to obey Jesus’ commands.*



Christians. If that community takes in non-Christians, whether of other Faiths, or of no Faith at all, it is difficult to see how far Christian distinctiveness – the distinctiveness of that community – can be maintained. In other words it is argued that significant aspects of CE education policy are actually incoherent.

The church has rightly taken with the greatest seriousness the charge that its schools are divisive, particularly on racial grounds. However, although various senior figures (including the past Chairman of the Board of Education, and the new Archbishop of Canterbury) have denied this charge, and more considered political reflection now recognises the influence of poverty and poor housing in causing social unrest, the church continues to behave as though the charge were true. Hence the formal request by the church to government to legislate in order to give diocesan boards greater influence over governing bodies, so that – it would appear – all may eventually formulate inclusive admissions policies: policies which will explicitly admit children “of other faiths and of no faith”.<sup>3</sup> This is because the church now sees church schools as one of the few ways left in which it can retain its position in British society.

Where the church has been strangely silent is in affirming the undoubted fact that Christianity is itself a multi-racial and multi-cultural religion: many church schools in London, for example, which admit pupils on Faith criteria, have a virtually all-black pupil intake. Neither has much attention been given to the theological inconsistency of taking a positive social view of other religions, while combining that with a low theological assessment of the salvific effectiveness and ‘validity’ of those Faiths. Indeed, I argue that a high theological view of other Faiths (certainly a theological inclusivism, if not pluralism) which takes seriously the differences between the great Faiths (particularly differences in

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<sup>3</sup> Archbishops’ Council Board of Education ‘*National Guidance to Diocesan Boards of Education on Admissions to Church of England Schools*’, November 2002, p. 2.



modes of worship) would suggest that single-Faith schools are preferable to multi-Faith schools.<sup>4</sup>

Neither has any real attention been given to the view of many people of other Faiths that they would prefer to have their own schools – indeed, on a number of occasions the Church of England has expressed worries about such a development. ‘Why’ – the question is at least implicit – ‘should other Faiths want their own schools when they have ours?’ Behind such an apparently naïve question lies a complete failure to understand the importance to parents of the values and belief contexts of the schools they seek to choose for their children. This is puzzling when one considers just how many senior church people actively choose the independent sector – if not single-Faith CE schools - for their own children.

Certainly the notion of parental preference seems to be low among official CE priorities. Archbishop Carey spoke and wrote of Christian families being turned away from CE schools so that those schools can admit non-Christian children. A theology of sacrifice does not seem to have ever been explicitly put forward to support this view, but it is clearly not a sacrifice made by many who support it. Neither does the church seem to recognise that the thrust of the education agenda of a Government it clearly supports is diversity. The Labour Government (1997 – present day) while abolishing Grant Maintained Status, has given all schools the majority of the flexibilities enjoyed by GM schools under the last Tory Government; arguably it has gone even further than its predecessor in the provision of an increasing proportion of direct central funding to schools. It has expanded considerably the Tory Specialist Schools programme, and has gone on record as applauding difference and distinctiveness within the education system. Indeed, Morris publicly affirmed the rights of parents to have schools which reflected their values and

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the possibilities and problems of inter-Faith worship see Akehurst PR & Wootton RWF (1977), Webster D (1993), and Shone J (2004) which offers a decidedly uncertain conclusion.

beliefs. Yet the CE would seem to want to deny both diversity within its system, by imposing (if it can) a single inclusive model for its schools, and as a result refuse to give sufficient weight to the demand of Christian parents for Christian schools, a demand even supported by Estelle Morris.

So far, this chapter has reviewed arguments ‘against’ the emerging CE education policy, as the church seeks to use its role in education both to cling on to influence in a post-Christian society, and to engage in the evangelistic agenda in which parishes have apparently failed. I would like to conclude by proposing an alternative vision for CE schools based on a 21<sup>st</sup> century ecclesiology together with evidence of Governors’ aspirations for their schools uncovered during the empirical research.

If, as has been argued, the Church of England can no longer be (if it ever really was) the ‘church of the nation’ in any real and meaningful sense, then what is it? The idea of the ‘gathered church’ should not be confused with the sect (as some have claimed it is). It has been argued above that the core notion of the church is of a people called out for the service of God and the service of humankind. Whilst this imperative to serve cannot be denied, it has been questioned as to whether such a mission implies any need to provide schools for the general population; it is naïve to accept that Christian altruism was the main motive for doing so in the past.

Whatever view is held of the process of secularisation: long lasting and gradual, or recent and sharp, there can be little doubt that the modern British churches, in common with many churches across Europe, exist in post-Christian and highly secularised societies. Of course, there will be those times in individual lives (birth, marriage and death) and in the life of the community (such as, nationally, with the death of the Princess of Wales, and locally as a focal point for the response of people to the 2002 Soham child murders) when



the churches will be able to meet the often inchoate religious needs of the general population.<sup>5</sup> But beyond service, the church is called to active Christian discipleship and the commitment that entails. That is why the socialisation of baptism has been a significant factor in the desacralisation of Christianity. As Callum Brown has argued so persuasively,<sup>6</sup> Christian identity has now disappeared from English society. In such a society the notion of a national church is itself incoherent. However, the falling away of nominalism has provided the opportunity for the church to retrieve a more authentic Christianity. The rediscovery of what the church should be can inform the discovery of what CE schools should be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It has been argued that the use of church schools as vehicles of evangelism is not only fundamentally wrong, it is also misguided in that it has been shown not to work.<sup>7</sup> However, the ‘nurture school’ is well placed to support the development of the child’s faith, already being nurtured at home and in the faith community, and it is on such that the future of the church literally depends. Results from the 2001 Census<sup>8</sup> tell us that apart from some 400,000 who consider themselves to be Jedi Knights, some 37.3 million people in England and Wales designate themselves ‘Christian’. As noted above, self-designation is hardly a guarantee of validity; one might ask how the self-designated Jedi Knights practise their ‘faith’. As one Anglican priest noted: “I was told that most people did not believe in religion in the way I do, and that many people signed up as Christian because they were

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<sup>5</sup> In Soham, the Church has played a tremendous role in meeting the spiritual needs of the town, and particularly the very special needs of the murdered children’s parents, and the Vicar, the Revd Alban Jones, stated that “the parish church serves the whole community, not just the paid up members”; it is noteworthy that Mr Alban-Jones received his MBE for “services to the community”: *Church Times* 21/11/03, p. 7; the argument of this thesis does not seek to deny the importance of that kind of service role for the Church, but it is a role little different in practice from many other charitable organisations.

<sup>6</sup> Brown CG (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Yet the call is still repeated: “Schools are today’s and tomorrow’s future. It is about frontline evangelism”. Church Commissioner Peter Bruinvels, quoted *Church Times*, 29/8/03, p. 4; and still opposed: “We will end up with a profusion of church schools but no clergy or parish churches”. The Revd D Jennings, quoted in the *TES* 12/9/03, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Figures supplied by the BBC; Francis believes that the 2001 Census was flawed in the way the question on religious affiliation was asked; in not distinguishing between different Christian denominations, the information gathered was “not only inadequate but also possibly misleading”. Francis LJ (2003). ‘Religion and Social Capital: The Flaw in the 2001 Census in England and Wales’, in Avis P (ed), (2003) p. 61.



not of any other faith.” He concluded: “Beware statistics!”<sup>9</sup> Or as the leader writer of the *Church Times* suggested:

[the figures] might suggest increased awareness of other faiths....coloured by political events since 11 September 2001, has sharpened the sense in people of Christian background that theirs is a different faith and/or a different cultural identity. There may be a link in people’s minds between Christianity and Western democracy and social freedoms.<sup>10</sup>

Church attendance figures for the same year, across denominations, show between 5 – 6 million for England. A recent publication<sup>11</sup> cites the findings of the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey, where some 1,000 children a week under the age of 15 left the church; the Christian Research News-sheet,<sup>12</sup> put the matter more starkly: “two-thirds of 10 year olds in church will leave in their next two years.”

If the CE took its nurture role more seriously, as opposed to the somewhat naïve aspiration found in ‘Dearing’ for evangelising the fringes of Anglicanism, there might be some hope of bridging these enormous gaps, and stemming the undoubted flow from many churches. While some believe that the booklet ‘Called to Account’<sup>13</sup> should be dismissed simply because of its right-wing provenance, there is at least some truth in its claim: “The liberal experiment is dead; unfortunately, it is in danger of taking the Church of England into the grave with it.”<sup>14</sup> Or as Simon Jenkins put it:

The Church of England is like the Conservative Party and the BBC, overcentralised, overwrought and losing market share.....[and] children hold the key to future membership. There were 223,000 children in Anglican churches in 1991. There are some 80,000 today. This is hopeless.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Church Times* ‘Letters to the Editor’, 21/3/03, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Comment’ p. 8, 21/2/03.

<sup>11</sup> Brierley P. (2002).

<sup>12</sup> *Quadrant* January 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Published by the Social Affairs Unit, ed. Anderson D.

<sup>14</sup> The Revd Robbie Lowe, quoted *Church Times* 28/3/03.

<sup>15</sup> ‘The Church may be lost, but save our churches’, *The Times*, 26/2/03, p. 20.

One may reflect on how many of those 80,000 are hoping for a place in a CE secondary school, and how many would still be there if that place were no longer available to them. In any case, without active Christian nurture of the young,<sup>16</sup> will there be any Christians left in 50 years time to engage in evangelism? Perhaps the church's service to the nation could be more validly seen in preparing Christian children to take responsible roles in the world so that they can make some sort of difference to it.

All this is happening at a time when the Government is committed to diversity of provision within the education system, and when it makes a basic provision for all through the local community school. In an ideal world every child would be entitled and able to attend their local 'comp' (which offered good quality education).<sup>17</sup> Beyond that, they are able to 'opt into' a church school, (other) specialist schools, independent schools etc., should they feel the need to do so, or should their ethos be deemed by parents to be preferable. The church secondary school (unlike, for numerical and geographical reasons, the CE primary school) is not part of the basic provision, and should not be confused with it.

This point is implicitly supported by the growing emphasis over the past decade on the theme of distinctiveness. 'Dearing' wanted church schools to be both inclusive and distinctive. The coherence of this notion has been challenged. Clearly, however, Christian distinctiveness can only be enhanced where the school community is itself Christian (supported by factors such as long term church commitment). That enables, for example, true Christian worship to take place, rather than a syncretistic activity which has to be diluted in order not to offend the integrity of children of other Faiths, or the sensibilities of

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<sup>16</sup> Francis LJ and Gibson HM report research findings of "a general decline in adolescent religiosity" to which church schools might provide a positive influence. 'Popular Religious Television and Adolescent Attitudes towards Christianity' in Astley & Day (1992), p. 373.

<sup>17</sup> The fact that in 2003 left-wing MP Diane Abbott chose to send her son to an independent school despite the inevitable political 'flak' indicates graphically that such an aim has not yet been achieved.



those of no Faith at all.<sup>18</sup> How can any child who has not been brought up as a Christian sing ‘O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end’? However, school worship with a multi- and no-Faith community will inevitably require the singing of hymns to be restricted to those with a more social focus (‘When I needed a neighbour...’). Worship becomes little more than an exercise in social awareness.

In this thesis, in which I have argued that the nurture model has the only coherent rationale, consideration has been given to three variants: Strong (Domestic 1), Medium (Domestic 2) and Weak (Domestic 3). The first might be considered the most logical in denominational terms, where the CE is now in the same social category as the Roman Catholic Church has been in this country since the Reformation – a minority denomination. Just as the RC school is for Catholic children, so the CE school should be for CE children. However, in an age of active ecumenical partnerships, and where other Christian denominations have either drastically reduced their role in education (Methodists) or have had no real history of such provision (e.g. Baptists), it would seem right for the CE, itself a ‘broad church’ covering the whole theological and ecclesiological spectrum, might wish to share its schools and establish real ‘ecumenical nurseries’ (Waddington’s term)<sup>19</sup>. ‘Domestic’ then embraces ecumenism: they are Christian as opposed to Anglican schools. While there are some schools which see themselves as ‘communities of faith’ (in contrast to secular institutions) it is argued that this ‘weak domestic’ model, taking account of fundamental differences between Faiths in terms of both belief and worship, is a step too far, and that it would be better to establish more single Faith ‘faith schools’ (they too may be ‘ecumenical’, reflecting the ‘denominational’ differences in all Faiths). It is likely to be the

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<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that Archbishop Carey (who is in favour of multi-Faith CE schools) apparently complained about an All Saints Tide prayer, which included Mohammad and the Buddha among Christian saints, and which appeared on the website of the Anglican Communion; such references said Carey were “very unfortunate....it is not Church of England practice to refer to [leaders of other Faiths] in prayers”; Stephen Sykes was reported as describing the prayer as “a triumph of good intentions over good theology”: Reported on *news.telegraph.co.uk* 25/11/01.

<sup>19</sup> Waddington (1984) p. 71.



case (empirical research would be welcomed) that while families of Faiths other than Christianity may prefer a church school rather than a secular community school, on the basis that the church school has a serious regard for religion, they would prefer their children to attend a school where the beliefs and values are those of the Faith they profess. In a secular society a very positive contribution could be made by various 'faith schools' working together to heal social divisions, and ensuring that the English education system is not entirely secular.

The fact which the CE seems determined to refuse to face is that, at least up to the publication of the Dearing Report, the majority of CE secondary schools were either wholly or mainly of the 'nurture' model, varying between 'Domestic 1 – 3'. Amongst those which were not, or which were 'twin focus' schools, many heads and governors confessed when interviewed that, left to them and with the appropriate change in their circumstances, their preference would be for a nurture school. It remains to be seen whether the publication of the Dearing Report, and the subsequent 'bullish' activity of the church, causes any governing bodies to review their policies, and whether they do so willingly, or because they feel under pressure to do so.

The law has established the principle, not of parental choice, but of the exercise of parental preference. It has been deemed right that parents should have the opportunity of expressing a view on which school (or what kind of school) their children should attend. Obviously parental choice is an option for those who can afford it. That might suggest that the church – with a mission to the disadvantaged – would want to help maximise preference for those who cannot afford to buy education, yet have positive reasons for wanting to refuse the basic state provision. The view from the Board of Education has been – somewhat simplistically – anyone that wants a CE school for their child should have it, and for whatever reason. But in wishing to maximise preference for all, they have not been

prepared to lay down criteria by which one person's preference might be preferred over another's. Where the availability of such schools is limited, that is simply impractical, and potentially dishonest, or at least naively utopian.

The question has been asked: why should anyone who is not an Anglican/Christian want an Anglican/Christian school for their child? If it is simply to ensure a good education (however defined, but often by examination results), should that outweigh the preference of a committed Anglican/Christian family who want this particular school because it will engage with them and the Faith community in the Christian nurture of their child, and will provide an education in a values and beliefs context which directly reflects that of the home?

It is difficult to estimate the damage caused by Archbishop Carey through his refusal to refute the *TES* headline: 'Archbishop opposes all-Christian schools', and he has placed the majority of CE VA secondary schools in a very difficult, and somewhat embarrassing position ('even your Archbishop is against you'<sup>20</sup>). Yet whatever criticism may be made of 'Dearing' one thing is clear: it has not only raised the profile of church schools – indeed, coming when it unhappily did, at the time of social disturbances in certain northern towns, it may have done so negatively – it has, or ought to have, caused governing bodies to reflect on the nature and purpose of their schools.

In 1970 the church recognised two foci: the 'domestic' and the 'general'. At that time (particularly being in the first decade of what Brown has identified as the process of rapid secularisation in Britain), when Establishment still seemed reasonably secure, the church affirmed a preference for the 'general'. However, the Durham Report had a pessimistic view of the future. That concept of 'twin focus' was made even more explicit in

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<sup>20</sup> Comment made to me by a local politician.

‘Waddington’, and although the principle was never explicitly stated, it did seem that the twin focus was deemed to exist within the system, rather than being required within each individual school. Indeed, there was no requirement for any particular model. The church seemed happily to affirm all its schools, recognising that each one was different in some respect, not least because they all operated in differing contexts.

According to the Bishop of Blackburn, speaking as Chairman of the Board, as recently as November 2001, that was still the CE ‘policy’. His words are so significant, they are worth re-quoting:

The reality is that for Anglican schools there are different emphases according to local need and circumstances and the church would be unwise (and indeed un-Anglican) to go for one definition or one model for church school....<sup>21</sup>

We may even cite the ‘early Hall’ (i.e. when he had only been in the General Secretary’s post a short while):

....in practice, of course, church schools properly see themselves in a variety of different ways and have a variety of character and purpose.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, and despite claims to the contrary, it would appear that ‘Dearing’ itself (and Dearing himself)<sup>23</sup> had no problem with the concept of the nurture school:

In an increasingly secular society the church is right to respond to the concern of Christian parents to give their children the opportunity to experience what it is to learn in a distinctively Christian environment.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, it was justifiable for school governing bodies to

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<sup>21</sup> Chesters AC (2001).

<sup>22</sup> Carey, Hope & Hall (1998) p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> In a speech given to the Annual Conference of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads 20/9/01, Lord Dearing showed much more commitment to the domestic/nurture focus than had his Report, but “we ought to offer all we have to Christian families....[but] being realists....we had to position ourselves somewhere....acceptable to Government” [remarks noted by me].

<sup>24</sup> Dearing (2001) para 3.19.



...conclude that its task is to nurture Anglican or other Christian children in their faith and to allocate all its resources accordingly [because] there are other schools....to which children can go...<sup>25</sup>

Or we might quote again the former Secretary of State for Education who stated categorically that it was reasonable “to give preference to one Faith if the school was over-subscribed....”<sup>26</sup>

These quotations are clear enough in intent, and it is not difficult to see why neither the (then) Chairman and the General Secretary of the Board of Education have sought to clarify the discrepancy between what they say, and what is the Board’s policy. The simple answer is that they cannot do so. Indeed, the honesty which is the hallmark of Lord Dearing has made the reason for the church’s policy absolutely clear – it is to make church schools acceptable to a Labour Government which was under strong internal and external pressure to draw back from its previous, and for many surprising, public approval of such schools. The church seems to have decided that it is expedient to be on the side of Mammon on this matter, and that complicity with current political imperatives is likely to be more rewarding than storing up treasure in heaven.<sup>27</sup>

It is also likely that quite apart from ‘Dearing’ (which since its publication has been used only selectively by church officials in order to bolster their preferred ‘inclusive’ policy, with a veil being drawn over those passages which validate either a systemic twin focus and/or the nurture model) the CE was ‘bounced’ by the Summer 2001 disturbances, by ‘9/11’, and by the almost overwhelmingly negative media reaction inspired by the Report, into some swift policy-making ‘on the hoof’, with little consideration being given to the real issues. Superficiality was to be the hallmark of CE education policy post-‘Dearing’. Indeed, it would appear that the leadership of the Church of England came to believe that

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* para 4.43.

<sup>26</sup> Estelle Morris, *news.bbc.co.uk* 22/11/01.

<sup>27</sup> *Matthew* 6: 19 – 21.

‘Dearing’ had actually dealt with all the issues, and that there was nothing more to be said. It remains to be seen, of course, what success they will have in trying to convert the majority of CE secondary ‘nurture’ schools into an undifferentiated ‘twin focus’ model. If the church is successful in imposing a model that lacks any rationale, other than the perceived need for political correctness, then it will itself be the loser.

‘Dearing’ (somewhat oddly, it might be thought) called for VA schools to become more inclusive and for VC schools to become more distinctively Christian. This would seem to reduce both to the lowest common denominator of being neither one thing nor the other. I have argued that the rationale for the domestic/nurture model is far more compelling than that for the general/service model. Nevertheless, it is always important to ‘begin where you are’. It is clear that the vast majority of CE schools, the primary schools, have a general/service focus, and it would be at least impractical to suggest that should be radically altered, although it should be recognised that when even primary schools become oversubscribed, their admission policies have been known to embrace the nurture model.

However, the majority of CE VA secondary schools do regard themselves (implicitly or explicitly) as nurture schools. Instead of seeking to compel such schools to come into a single model, and one which has no ecclesiological or theological rationale, it would be better for the church to use its VC schools as those which reflect, even in the secondary sector (where they are a minority), the church’s continuing concern for the nation, while using its VA schools to offer Christian distinctiveness, within a diverse national system of education, and so fulfil what is the only valid rationale for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century denominational church. Ecclesiology requires the nurture model; the nurture model may even help provide a future for the church. But the final word in this chapter, which can also be a link to the next, may be left to a Roman Catholic scholar:

The very existence of Catholic schools and indeed of all faith-based schools constitutes part of the religious critique of the secular, without which both culture and freedom would be diminished.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Grace G. (2002a), p. 240.



## Chapter 9: The Single Faith Nurture model: some wider considerations and a new way ahead.

### Rationale

I have argued, both generally (for all Faiths) and specifically (for the Church of England), that the only type of faith school for which there is a valid rationale is that which has been termed the ‘domestic’ or the ‘nurture’ model. That model alone provides a defensible purpose and role for CE VA secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> This argument is based (for all Faiths) on the philosophical ground that parents should be given the opportunity of sending their children to a school which reflects and reinforces the values (and the beliefs which underlie those values) of the home, rather than one that does not. Such a parental demand

...need not be illiberal or indoctrinatory. Whilst some parents seeking separate religious schools may indeed want their religious faith merely inculcated into their children in such a way that it is not open to critical appropriation and challenge, others may share many liberal educational values and merely feel a defensible need for their children’s development towards independence and autonomy to proceed from the basis of sustained exposure to a particular norm of belief, practice and value.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, argues McClelland, this demand is quite understandable:

*For the committed Christian...* it is inconceivable that his children should be educated in a secular metier that takes no account of their ultimate spiritual destiny or of the harmony manifest in God’s design for man and for the world in which he is fleetingly at home. He finds it equally unacceptable that his children should be educated by teachers who often have no knowledge of the Christian way of life or code of behaviour or by those who have ceased to believe that such things have relevance or validity. To place his children into such an ambience in their formative years would be tantamount to exposing them to noxious influences working counter to their ultimate good.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller digest of the arguments see Shepherd P (2002). ‘Our Nature is to Nurture’ in *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads* April 2002, pp. 21 – 23; or Shepherd P (2004). ‘A Case for Faith Schools’, *Headlines: The Journal of the Secondary Heads Association*, Issue 44, March 2004, pp. 31 – 34.

<sup>2</sup> McLaughlin TH (1992). ‘Fairness, controversiality and the common school’, in Astley J & Francis LJ (eds) (1994), p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> McClelland VA (1988b). ‘Christian education and the denominational school’, in McClelland VA (1988a), p. 22. My italics; presumably, this would be an issue only for the committed Christian.

The same will be the case for other Faith families:

How could it satisfy the Muslim wish for their own religious schools, to be required to send their children to secular institutions? And what view should they form of a society that would respond to their expression of deep attachment to tradition by casting off its own inheritance? Of course, the latter gesture [“pressing for an end to specifically Christian teaching on the grounds of sympathy for other religions”] is a demonstration of tolerance and an acceptance of pluralism but, if the host society has so little respect for its own culture as no longer to require transmission of its religious tradition and the associated system of values, might one not doubt the seriousness of its regard for Muslim and other essentially religious, immigrant cultures?<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the argument has been accepted by a number of ecclesiastical and political authorities, none of whom seem to have drawn the logical conclusion from it. So, for example, Estelle Morris, when Secretary of State for Education, in her speech to the General Synod of the Church of England:

Are we the first generation who thinks that we’ve got a society that can’t tolerate and actually allow individual parents to exercise a right to have a faith-based education for their child? I don’t want to be part of that generation who actually gives up and shows that level of intolerance.....I want to show the same tolerance that all my predecessors...have shown to a parent’s right to a faith-based education and I want to extend that....<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the issue not considered by Morris is whether that “right to a faith-based education” is a universal right, or whether it only makes sense for it to be accorded to those who belong to the particular Faith. But even the Dearing Report implicitly supports the principle of giving priority to members of a Faith in its acceptance that a governing body would be right to

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<sup>4</sup> Haldane J (1986), quoted by Almond B (1988). ‘Conflict or Compromise? Religious and Moral Education in a Plural Context’, in McClelland VA (1988a), p. 113. The context of the quotation is a discussion about the apparent ease with which some educators are willing to dispense with Christianity as an essential element in RE teaching, as their response to multiculturalism. The first part of this quotation is also used in Halstead JM & Khan-Cheema A (1987). ‘Muslims and worship in the maintained school’, in Francis L & Thatcher A (1990), p. 197, where it is also claimed: “One of the major ironies in religious education in Britain today is that the presence of adherents of non-Christian faiths in our schools is being used to justify educational theory, policies and practice which are quite alien to their wishes”, and points out that “there is strong evidence that a large number of Muslims would like to have the same option that Anglicans, Roman Catholics and other currently enjoy, the choice of sending their children to a state school or to a voluntary-aided denominational [implied: ‘Muslim’] school.”

<sup>5</sup> 14/11/01; transcript provided by Colin Hopkins, Secretary to the Church Schools Review Group.



....conclude that its task is to nurture Anglican or other Christian children in their faith and to allocate all its resources accordingly [because] there are other schools...to which children can go...<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, in view of the position he was later to take (inconsistent as that was in his failure to reconcile his views about the 'mixed economy' of church schools with the single-model approach he appeared to be supporting) it is, perhaps, surprising to find Alan Chesters, before he became Bishop of Blackburn and Chairman of the CE Board of Education, writing as follows:

No longer can the church or Christian parents have any confidence in many county schools doing more than making the young aware that there is a religious dimension to life and hopefully giving them some knowledge of what the Christian believes and practices alongside other Faiths and value systems.<sup>7</sup>

Chesters goes on to express regret about the geographical patchiness of CE schools where, by implication, parents who share his lack of confidence in secular schooling (although it does not seem to have occurred to Chesters to mention that there is no reason why a secular school should provide Christian nurture) can find the support they need in bringing up their children as Christians. The only school which could reasonably provide this support would be a nurture school. Indeed, claims another commentator:

The kind of education provided in church schools could be in jeopardy if there were an insistence on open access....Christian parents....have a right to preserve in church schools the education they want for their children.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, both the Government and the Church of England, through its Synod, Board of Education and House of Bishops<sup>9</sup> (an astonishing degree of unanimity), are requiring new CE

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<sup>6</sup> *Op cit* para. 4.43, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Chesters AD (1988). 'Where is the child to be nurtured: church, home or school?' in Francis LJ and Thatcher A (eds) (1990). *Christian Perspectives for Education: a reader in the theology of education*, Leominster, Gracewing Fowler Wright, p. 285.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes F (1992). p. 57.



schools (and trying either to compel or to influence – depending on one’s perspective - established CE schools) to operate inclusive admissions policies, opening the schools to children of ‘all Faiths and none’ i.e. regardless of whether the family shares the values and beliefs of the school’s Foundation.

For the Church of England the case for the nurture school is also based on the assertion that it is no longer a national church in any meaningful sense, and therefore no longer has any reason (if provision of schools should ever have been a function of a church) to provide schools for the general population, particularly now that the state makes virtually full provision for the nation’s children (supported by a buoyant independent sector). It is only the historic position of the CE that has led to such a rationale being offered (most CE primary schools serve their local community regardless of religious affiliation). It is difficult to imagine that the CE, if taking the decision today to become involved in the English educational system for the first time, would do so by establishing schools for the community. What would be the purpose? This argument would also apply to any other Faith group which operated voluntary aided schools. They would have even less reason for a ‘general’ focus than a church which still aspired to the appellation ‘national’. Even if the motivation were simply to be ‘service to others’, then it has also been argued that the provision of schooling is no part of any Faith’s ‘core business’, any more than the provision of ‘general’ hospitals or prisons would be. In any case, most religious groups can ill-afford to make such a provision, and would be better directing their resources into forms of service which have a much greater and more direct

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<sup>9</sup> *House of Bishops Statement* released 15/1/02: "Through each of its 4,700 schools, the Church of England is strongly committed to serving the whole community from a distinctively Christian standpoint. Church schools must be distinctively Christian institutions rooted in the life of the parishes and open to the diverse communities they serve. Historically, Church of England schools have been a service to the nation's children and this *requires them to be inclusive in admissions*, as most already are. We are committed to ensuring that all Church of England schools should seek to offer places to children of other faiths and of no faith in their local community." Reiterated by Canon John Hall in the weekly e-mailing to Diocesan Directors of Education and Secondary School Heads. 14/5/04. My italics.

effect on the quality of people's lives. Furthermore, as the empirical research has demonstrated, the nurture model (or variants of it) is not only widespread across the CE's (voluntary aided) secondary sector (at least up to 'Dearing', and it still remains to be seen what impact the Dearing Report has on the admissions policies of established CE secondary schools), but it is the model which many heads and governors feel they should provide, whenever their situation allows or encourages that (see Chapter 6 above).

However I have also argued (as, for example, does Francis)<sup>10</sup> that the focus of the CE nurture school should not be narrow, but should embrace other Christian denominations, particularly those without their own schools (this is the 'Moderate Domestic 2' model), but that it should not go so far (due to such problematic factors as major differences in belief and worship) as to embrace children of Faiths other than Christianity (the 'Weak Domestic 3' model). Sedgwick also argues for an ecumenical dimension, commenting that it is "very striking that ecumenical relationships have frankly been so little part of church schools in the past", and that the need for this to be addressed arises from "seeing how sociological and theological models of the church can be correlated together".<sup>11</sup> This thesis has attempted to do just that, and its arguments have led to the conclusions above. Both traditional foci of CE schools – general/service and domestic/nurture – have, Sedgwick claims, ignored the ecumenical questions, because they have avoided

....asking how the two traditions of Anglican and Roman Catholic schools (with some Free Church ones as well) relate to each other. They avoid the difficult realities of practising forgiveness and reconciliation between often exclusive denominations. They avoid the sociological critique of how far the inevitable process of becoming an institution....destroys the reality of the vision.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hannaford R (ed) (1998) p. 232.

<sup>11</sup> Sedgwick P (1992) 'The Sectarian Future of the Church and Ecumenical Church Schools' in Astley & Day (1992) p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 249.



This may seem a heavy responsibility to be placed on schools, but then so is being said to be at the centre of the church's mission to the nation! Reference has already been made to those schools of the 'Domestic 1' model (and even those 'Domestic 2' which apply different criteria to Anglicans and 'other Christians' in their admissions policies), which create ecumenical mayhem in their areas, as (for example) Methodist families begin worshipping at an Anglican Church, in order to secure a place at the CE school. Schools will have their part to play in continuing ecumenical conversations, if, as I have argued, they take the need for practical ecumenism in their admissions policies seriously enough, and doubtless the 'true' 'Domestic 2' CE school will certainly be able to make an important contribution both to the ecumenical agenda, and also to the realisation of a broad and creative Christian vision within an institutional context. But ultimately it is for the churches themselves to take such practical ecumenism much more seriously.

There is, however, a practical ecumenical issue to consider: should an ecumenically inclusive CE school admit Roman Catholic children? That might seem to be a bizarre question – why should Catholics be excluded from this kind of ecumenical partnership? The answer is primarily pragmatic. If a CE secondary school is (as many are) heavily oversubscribed, then it may be deemed unfair for a RC child to take up a place in that school, so depriving another Christian child, when there is a national network of RC schools available to the one, but not actually to the other. But there is also a theological dimension to the question. Firstly, there is reason to believe that the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism is both theoretically<sup>13</sup> and practically<sup>14</sup> qualified. If that is the case, then there will be important issues arising from the level of commitment which the Roman Catholic Church could give to any

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Christopher Hill's discussion in 'Anglican Orders: An Ecumenical Context' in Franklin RW (ed) (1996), pp. 87 – 95, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the fate of Oxford's joint RC/Anglican school, discussed below.



formal participation in the Domestic 2 model (sharing the Eucharist is an obvious and very public example).<sup>15</sup> It may also be argued that although the RC school seeks to provide a ‘denominational education’, the way the Roman Catholic Church understands that provision may be significantly different from the understanding that the CE has of its ‘domestic’ focus. There is, for example, no settled Anglican theological orthodoxy to be passed on which compares to that of the Roman Catholic Church. It is important, therefore, to explore how far the nature and purpose of the Roman Catholic school may differ from that of the CE school, and how that difference might be relevant to other kinds of Faith school. Might, for example, the RC ‘type’ be closer in aim and purpose to (say) a Muslim aided school (indeed, if more Muslim aided schools were to be established, would they, too, tend to divide along Sunni or Shia lines?)<sup>16</sup> than to a CE aided school, despite the fact that they share the same Christian Faith? Would the Roman Catholic Church find it possible, or even desirable (because of that sense of theological and ecclesiological exclusivity), to develop the ecumenical ‘Domestic 2’ model?

### **The Roman Catholic School**

Gerald Grace tells of how, when in 1993 he attended a seminar on Catholic education held at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge, and heard presentations by two American scholars, he realised how “relatively undeveloped” was the scholarly literature on Roman Catholic schools in the UK,<sup>17</sup> where scholars inhabited a “secret garden...known...only to the cognoscenti”.<sup>18</sup> While that may have been the case (someone working in the Anglican sector can hardly

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. Chadwick (1994), pp. 93 – 94. There was a joint Eucharist up to the Peace, after which the “two groups turned their backs on one another, facing in opposite directions towards their respective celebrating priest”. p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> “Most Muslim schools in England are multi-ethnic and draw children from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Although mono-faith they portray diverse interpretations of Islam.” Johnson H & Castelli M (2002), pp. 33 -34.

<sup>17</sup> Grace G (2002a), p. vii; or as Conroy puts it: “It was only serendipity which would have enabled a Catholic teacher or student of education to encounter a serious study of Catholic education originating in Britain in the 1970s”! Conroy JC (1999b) ‘From Cliché to Critique’, in Conroy JC (ed) (1999a), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Grace G (2002a), p. xi.

comment); the traditional model of the Roman Catholic school seems capable of simple and uncontroversial expression:

Every Catholic child from a Catholic home, taught by Catholic teachers in a Catholic school.<sup>19</sup>

Cardinal Hume expressed the same principle slightly differently:

There should be a place at a Catholic school for every Catholic child.<sup>20</sup>

These maxims reflect a confessional and nurturing approach to education, which from their development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was intended to be

...a cultural and faith bastion against the potentially polluting effects of hegemonic Protestantism and secular rationalism. The Catholic school was constituted *as another form of church* and its duty was to transmit and renew the sacred truths of the Catholic faith and an understanding of its discourse, symbols and ritual practices among its largely poor and working-class adherents.<sup>21</sup>

This concern for nurture was consonant with the motives of the other 19<sup>th</sup> Century church school builders:

....it was the quality of Christian nurture which the church could provide, moulding the believers of the next generation, which mattered. Such motivation lay behind Free Church and Roman Catholic schools in particular, but was not absent from Church of England schools.<sup>22</sup>

It is also arguable that they shared (to a greater or lesser extent) the notion that the school was (like the Sunday School) “another form of church”, because no disjuncture was seen between the role of the church in education, and its other religious and social functions. I quoted above

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted Kay and Francis (1996) p. 48, but from Pope Pius XI's encyclical letter of 1929 '*Divini Illius Magistri*'; it derives from Canon 1374: McLaughlin TH, O'Keefe J and O'Keefe B (eds) (1996b), p. 4, where it reflects “social enclosure”.

<sup>20</sup> Hume B (1997b) p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Grace G (2002a), p. 8. My italics.

<sup>22</sup> Hooker R & Lamb C (1986), p. 96.



(and will do so again below) the words of William Temple about the religious essence of education; Pope Pius's own words from the Encyclical are not so different:

....there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end....<sup>23</sup>

Education and faith were two sides of the same coin. This was why all churches saw education as being properly their business. So prior to the Second Vatican Council the purpose of the Catholic school was quite clear:

Probably the most distinctive, certainly the most important benefit of education within a Catholic school is the ordering of knowledge wherein the spiritual and the supernatural are properly ordered in the hierarchy of values.<sup>24</sup>

This was not merely about the teaching of religion; equally important was "the Catholic attitude towards life as a whole", because "it is Catholicism as a culture, not as a conflicting creed, which is at odds with the spirit of the modern world, and in a sense makes Catholics a people apart."<sup>25</sup> Although these words came from an American Catholic, there would not have been much disagreement from this side of the Atlantic. This notion of being 'apart' from the rest of society (not least, other Christian denominations), was felt particularly strongly by Catholics in England until at least the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, and provided an enormous impetus to their school building programme. It was through their schools that Catholic identity was to be both protected and enhanced. But a similar motive can also be detected in the National Society's expressed aim:

...to teach....the doctrines of Religion according to the principles of the Established Church, and to train them to the performance of their religious duties by an early discipline.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted McClusky NG (1959) p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted Hammond PC (1977) p. 155.



However, not all was well with English Catholic education in the years after the Second World War, although there were some apparently paradoxical outcomes. First came the cry for distinctiveness:

There are relatively few documented cases where it would seem that Catholic schools are significantly different from other schools.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand J.B. Mays argued that up to the 1950s Catholic schools placed their emphasis on

...indoctrination and an attempt to secure conformity to authority and dogma rather than on wide cultural interests and the attainment of a balanced liberal view of human life.<sup>28</sup>

That would certainly seem to meet the criterion of distinctiveness! It may be, however, that despite the emphasis on distinctive Catholic teaching, many Catholic schools were still not seen to be distinctive enough in their outcomes: perhaps the somewhat doctrinaire approach to education failed to produce a sufficiency of practising adults. Furthermore, Hornsby-Smith found that in the 60s and 70s that

...the traditional Catholic insistence that Catholic children from Catholic homes should be taught by Catholic teachers in Catholic schools has increasingly come under attack from Catholics themselves. It has been claimed that Catholic schools in this country are too costly, that they are socially divisive, and anti-ecumenical, that they are intellectually inferior, authoritarian, over protective, and singularly ineffective in their aims of producing practising, knowledgeable, and committed Catholics.<sup>29</sup>

But, there was another side to this coin also noted by Hornsby-Smith. Catholic schools contributed to the development of

...a 'new Catholic middle class', upwardly mobile as a result of the successful achievement of those qualifications and credentials necessary for professional, technical,

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<sup>27</sup> Hornsby-Smith M (1978) p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> (1962). *Education and the Urban Child*, quoted *ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

administrative and managerial occupations. As a result, Catholics became more socially and geographically mobile and diffused more evenly throughout the different regions...they became more 'respectable' and this contributed to a declining hostility towards them. Within the church, they exerted increasing pressures on priest for a greater say in parish governance, notably as governors and managers of Catholic schools.<sup>30</sup>

From Vatican II this began to change: the "humane language [of the Council documents] sharply reversed the austere and doctrinaire tone of most earlier commentaries on education."<sup>31</sup> The accompanying Declaration on Catholic Education urged schools to be "enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity", and to act as "the saving leaven of the human family". Schools were enjoined to help their pupils

....combine personal development with growth as the new creatures that baptism made them; in the end it makes the message of salvation the principle of order for the whole human culture, so that the knowledge which pupils gradually acquire of the world, of life, and of man, is enlightened by faith.<sup>32</sup>

The Council led to a renewed impetus to, and more confidence in, discussion of the purposes of Catholic education. So, for example, in 'The Catholic School' (Vatican Documents, 1977), we read:

Catholic schools aim at forming in the Christian those particular virtues which will enable him to live a new life in Christ and help him to play faithfully his part in building up the Kingdom of God [so "mirroring the mission of the church"].<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the Catholic school was seen to be a community which was an "irreplaceable source of service to society", and one, at that which "first and foremost offers its educational

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<sup>30</sup> Horsnby-Smith M 'The changing social and religious context of Catholic schooling in England and Wales' in Eaton et al (2000), p. 193.

<sup>31</sup> Bryk AS et al. (1993), p. 51

<sup>32</sup> (1965) *Declaration on Christian Education*, Part 8, in Abbott WM (ed) (1966), p. 646

<sup>33</sup> Quoted Bryk AS et al (1993) p. 53.



service to the poor”, so “working for the common good”.<sup>34</sup> In theory, therefore, Catholic schools were to be servant schools; but servants to whom?

With the impact of Vatican II and increasing social acceptability the Roman Catholic Church, and its schools, began to emerge from what Hornsby-Smith calls its ‘fortress’ mentality, although what it moved towards is less clearly definable.<sup>35</sup> Catholic schools shared in the problems of falling rolls and comprehensivisation, with the associated contraction in the number of potential candidates for teaching appointments. Some Catholics actively began to question the need for expenditure on schools in the light of a falling birth rate. This provided impetus to a more careful examination of the question which had hitherto been somewhat dormant: ‘what *should* be distinctive about our schools?’

Whatever that was had to lie at the centre of Catholic faith, for “Catholic education is...based on a particular and detailed philosophy of life.”<sup>36</sup> But it was not simply something to be ‘bolted on’ to an ‘ordinary’ education. It was not the icing on the cake; rather it was the secret ingredient in the cake, which had “implications for the entire educational experience of the child.”<sup>37</sup> There was a particular emphasis on character formation. So Catholic education came to be seen as distinctive not simply through its explicitly religious teaching, but

....in virtue of its embodiment of a particular view about the meaning of human persons and of human life, its aspiration to engage in a certain kind of holistic influence, and its concerns with the formation of its students *in its own religious and moral tradition*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted Grace G (2002a) p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Hornsby-Smith M (2000) p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> McLaughlin TH (1996). ‘The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education’, in McLaughlin TH, O’Keefe J. and O’Keefe B (eds) (1996a), p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 145. My italics.



The fact that the 'distinctiveness' agenda developed strongly in both the CE and the RC churches around the same time is no accident. For if such questions are asked when there appear to be too many schools, and people want to know what purpose they are serving; they really become significant when demand begins to exceed supply, and schools develop the confidence to celebrate that distinctiveness. By the late 1980s, with secondary school rolls beginning to rise, church schools in England were entering a period of renaissance of which talk of distinctiveness was both a cause and effect. But was there a sufficiently clear rationale for either the Catholic or the Anglican school to be able to express that distinctiveness?

The Education Congregation which developed Vatican II thinking had a clear view of what Catholic schools ought to be about:

The activity of a Catholic school is, above all else, an activity that shares in the evangelising mission of the church.<sup>39</sup>

So the aim was both evangelical and salvific, and Catholic parents were reminded very firmly that they were expected to send their children to Catholic schools:

...the Council calls to mind [parents'] *duty* to entrust their children to Catholic schools, when and where this is possible, to support such schools to the extent of their ability, and to work along with them for the welfare of their children.<sup>40</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the approach of the Church of England which has never urged Anglican parents to choose CE schools as a religious duty, but has instead pointedly claimed that they are for any and everyone:

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<sup>39</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) *The Religious Dimension of Catholic Education*, Rome, para. 101.

<sup>40</sup> *Op cit.* p. 647, my italics.

The simple answer is that Church of England schools exist for the church and for the community. The problem [of oversubscription] would go away if there were enough places to satisfy demand....<sup>41</sup>

So Catholic schools were seen to have a distinctive purpose:

[It] has the dual function of 'nurturing the intellectual faculties' in common with all schools and introducing pupils to the cultural (for which we may read religious') heritage bequeathed to them...[Therefore] parents, because of their fundamental responsibility for the education of their children, should have full freedom, in partnership with the State, to select a Christian school which will help them fulfil their duty.<sup>42</sup>

The school has, of course, the same basic function of any school; but the Catholic school also has a duty to provide specific support to Catholic parents in nurturing their children in the Catholic traditions: religious and cultural. But even more than that, McClelland believed it vital that the Catholic school be

...a microcosm of a community in which Christian values are clearly in operation...[and] there has to be a recognition and an agreement that the Catholic ethos is central to all the work of the school, that religion constitutes the unifying element in the curriculum and that this fact is accepted by parents and the Catholic community upon whose support the school relies.<sup>43</sup>

As argued above (Chapter 5) the logic of the admissions policy inevitably follows: if this is the purpose, then who should be admitted to the school? Recognising that the school's identity and ethos is largely a function of

...the values, convictions and beliefs that prevail amongst its members....it is for this reason that [Catholic educationalists] claim that admissions have to be controlled in order to safeguard identity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hall J 'The trouble with being choosy', *Church Times Education Supplement*, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2000, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> McClelland VA (1992b) 'The Concept of Catholic Education' in McClelland VA (ed). (1992a), p. 4

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur J (1994). p. 35.



By 'control' is meant the need to secure that a significant majority of pupils are Catholic; without that the Catholic identity of the school would be diluted. Roman Catholic schools have tended, for the same reason, to try to appoint Catholic teachers, and even when that has not been possible (or where they have been compelled by circumstances to admit non-Catholic pupils), they have "been careful to ensure that the school's ethos, based upon Catholic values and beliefs, is not seriously affected."

However, this apparent singleness of purpose hides some complexities:

In attempting to define the term 'Catholic education' one is faced with extraordinary difficulties, since no body of scholarly literature exists in which the term is used with any consensus.<sup>45</sup>

Arthur makes the point, for example, that the evangelical aspect of Catholic education is not entirely straightforward:

Faith is not the result of Catholic education, since faith is a gift from God, but it is its presupposition.....The implication for Catholic education is clear: faith and human knowledge need to be integrated so that religious truth informs the whole of life and understanding....The [primary] aim of Catholic education concerns our call to eternal life, while the secondary [aim] involves the essentials or means employed to this end.<sup>46</sup>

The purpose is seen not to be evangelisation for conversion (to Catholicism), but evangelisation for the purpose of nurturing the child in the faith s/he already has, the ecclesial mark of which is baptism. We can recognise in Arthur's view a second important area of contrast between CE and RC schools. For the former, the main criterion for admission is often (especially for secondary schools) practice, whereas for the latter, the main criterion for admission is baptism, often regardless of practice.<sup>47</sup> This contrast is important, because it has

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<sup>45</sup> Arthur J (1995). p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 46, 47, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur J (1994) p. 42.



been argued above that, certainly so far as Anglican theology (if there be such a thing) is concerned, baptism without subsequent practice is somewhat meaningless. This is not the case for Catholic theology where baptism is understood to be an efficacious sacrament.

The two kinds of school community, therefore, might be quite different. In the oversubscribed CE secondary school there would most likely be a community of pupils well grounded in worship and other involvement in the church community (at least, before they arrive at the school), perhaps with a broad ecumenical spread; whereas the community of the Catholic school might contain only a minority of practising Catholics (measured by attendance at Mass), although the vast majority – often 100% - are likely to be baptised.<sup>48</sup>

Part of the everyday social reality which Catholic schools have to cope with is the pluralism of the religious beliefs and commitment of their students...<sup>49</sup>

Arthur notes discussion within the sector (in the 1970s) about the differing expectations of Catholic schools where most or all were practising, and those schools where only a minority were practising. It was thought that the main religious impact would be had in the former rather than the latter, and therefore that the possibility had to be faced that “Catholic education is virtually wasted on three-fourths of those in Catholic schools because of the absence of a sufficiently religious family milieu.”<sup>50</sup> This would seem to support the view that the only effective role for a faith school can be found in its work with the children of families with an active commitment to that Faith.

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<sup>48</sup> That is certainly the case at Thornleigh Salesian RC College in Bolton; source: Headteacher, conversation January 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Hornsby-Smith MP (2000). ‘The changing social and religious context of Catholic schooling in England and Wales’ in Eaton et al (2000), p. 204.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur J (1994). p. 36.

Research carried out around 1990 in the Oxfordshire part of the Archdiocese of Birmingham showed greatly “divergent views and practices” over school admissions.<sup>51</sup> While the ecclesial mark of baptism was generally acknowledged and affirmed, one school required further ‘proofs’ (which the Archdiocese discouraged), including confirmation and while most governors and heads recognised that non-Catholics might be admitted, they varied in their definitions of who that might include: some, for example, would accept only baptised Christians, and most tried (despite it being very difficult to enforce in law) to ensure that any non-Catholics who wanted to attend would take a full part in RE and Worship. One particularly interesting, although somewhat expedient, argument was that as it was the teachers who gave the school its Catholic identity, the admission of non-Catholics would protect their jobs!<sup>52</sup> Writing in 2002, however, Grace averred that the notion that “Catholic schools exist to serve Catholics only” is, certainly from an international perspective, “erroneous”, and that they can “legitimately claim to be in the service of the common good in education and not simply that of the specific good of Catholic communities”.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, therefore, there has been no single model of the Catholic school, just as there has been no single model of the Anglican school. But was there so much divergence in the Catholic understanding of the fundamental purpose of Catholic schools?

During the debates on the *Declaration on Christian Education*,<sup>54</sup> different views had been expressed by Bishops about the purpose of RC schools. Some argued for a more ecumenical approach to Catholic education, whilst others asserted the need for some direct missionary work to be done, and desired to use the school for that purpose. Others reaffirmed the traditional view that RC schools were primarily a way of nurturing the Catholic faith in

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Grace G (2002a), p. xii.

<sup>54</sup> During 1988.



Catholic young people. The final declaration by the Congregation for Catholic Education might therefore be seen to express a compromise position, with

....a significant shift towards increased dialogue with modern educational thought [with] emphasis...increasingly placed on service to the community, involvement with the secular world, the dignity of persons, and religious freedom.<sup>55</sup>

However, the Congregation had produced a report ten years earlier in which it had been stated:

Christ is the foundation of the whole education enterprise in a Catholic school....The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school Catholic.<sup>56</sup>

The overriding expectation, certainly at that point, was that the Catholic school would be a school of Catholics; indeed, “what makes the school Catholic is the extent to which the pupils share the Christian vision”.<sup>57</sup>

This expectation was to be affected by a number of quite different factors: (i) the positive view that Vatican II had taken of other Faiths; (ii) a much more positive focus on ecumenical relations with other Christian churches; (iii) a general sense of *rapprochement* with the State and a concern for working together for equality and justice; (iv) the phenomenon of falling secondary school rolls and the need for school reorganisation in the late 1970s and 1980s. But there was also a more profound change, which was a direct outcome of Vatican II: some Catholics, who sensed a less authoritarian church in the making, felt freer to choose which doctrines and rules they would follow (the classic example being the use of contraception). In particular, the pressure placed on the family by the priest to have the child apply to an RC school has become less and less effective over the years, which is why some CE schools have

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<sup>55</sup> Arthur J (1995) p. 50.

<sup>56</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) *The Catholic School*, Rome, paras 34 & 53.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur J (1995) p. 58.



become under even greater pressure as RC parents prefer them to their local RC school.<sup>58</sup> All this has meant that some RC schools (despite the amendment to the law in the 1986 Education (No. 2) Act which enabled governing bodies of church schools which were undersubscribed to limit the overall size of the school intake in order to preserve the religious character of the school)<sup>59</sup> became more prepared to consider admitting non-Catholic children.

However, following the signal 1980 Education Act which, for the first time, compelled all schools to publish an admissions policy and apply it in such a way that could be appealed, if parents chose to challenge the decision of the school, the Catholic Education Council (CEC), the equivalent body to the CE Board of Education, had issued guidelines to its schools, which stated that the first claimant on a Catholic school was the Catholic family. Official guidance even suggested a maximum of 15% non-Catholic admissions to a school. Cardinal Hume warned against admissions policies which might undermine the Catholic ethos of a school.<sup>60</sup> McClelland saw the presence of non-Catholic children in a Catholic school as presenting “a peculiar challenge as well as a problem”. They must be “exposed” to the Catholic ethos and their parents must accept that. But, for him, the bottom line was clear:

The admission of such pupils in very large numbers would undermine the Catholic nature of a given school, as indeed would the appointment of non Roman Catholic teachers in significant numbers.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, research carried out by Francis suggested that Catholic Governors tended not to take much account of their non-Catholic population when formulating school policies, and continued to provide a Catholic religious programme for everyone.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> It has been my personal experience that RC priests have gone so far as to actually refuse to validate the church attendance of the family for entry to my CE school in order to prevent the child's admission.

<sup>59</sup> This right was removed from 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Hume B (1988) p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> McLelland VA (1992), p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur J (1995) p. 113.

It would appear that despite some consideration being given to establishing broader admissions policies, Catholic schools were still seen, on the whole, as being for Catholic children, with the “unspoken subtext of there also being a recognisable Catholic curriculum”.<sup>63</sup> Some were even accused of being “bastions of white supremacy and [of] having racist attitudes”.<sup>64</sup> As Bishop Vincent Nichols noted in an address to the CES Conference (Birmingham 1995), there were “...comparatively few Catholic schools with significant numbers of people of faiths other than Christian.”<sup>65</sup> He pointed to the very real challenges faced by such schools, and went on to outline ways in which those challenges might be met (including how the teacher might deal with the ‘uniqueness of Christ’); but what was noticeably absent in the address was any recommendation that Catholic schools should take more non-Catholic children.<sup>66</sup> Of course, as secondary school rolls began to increase, Catholic schools came under just as much pressure to ‘reserve’ their places as Anglican schools.

During the main period of falling secondary school rolls the rate of non-Catholic pupil increase in Catholic schools has been judged to have been equivalent to that church opening two new large comprehensive schools each year.<sup>67</sup> By 1992 Catholic schools in Birmingham had around half their pupils as non-Catholics.<sup>68</sup> So there has been, in Catholic schools, although perhaps to a lesser extent, the same dilemma as that identified above in the CE’s call for inclusivity and distinctiveness (in the CE sector the call for inclusivity is system wide and not simply focused in areas of undersubscription): how can the Catholic ethos of the school be protected from dilution, when non-Catholic children are admitted to the school? As Arthur notes:

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<sup>63</sup> Judge H (2001), p. 231.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur J (1995). p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> Nichols V (1997), p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> Bishop Nichols was Observer on the CE Church Schools Review Group.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur J (1995). p. 198.

<sup>68</sup> Judge H (2001) p. 233.



[T]he issue of admissions control is often seen as particularly vital in the Catholic sector. For it is a sector which has traditionally schooled its own community.....Catholic schools generally stress a Christian-related criterion in their admissions policies, which has the effect of restricting the possibility of cultural and religious diversity<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, there were areas of the country where the spread of Catholic schools is so limited, that preference was always given to practising Catholics. Clearly, the preferred choice of at least some Governing Bodies was to nurture practising Catholics in the Faith, rather even than to evangelise the Catholic fringes. In other areas, the debate was not about practising or non-practising Catholics, but about Catholic or non-Catholic pupils. For some schools there was no debate at all: it was either admit non-Catholics or close!

At the time when Arthur was writing, these kinds of problems seemed to him to have been exacerbated by a general failure in church policy-making: "At the episcopal level it is more appropriate to talk of a degree of disjunction between principle and policy in Catholic education".<sup>70</sup> He quotes Bishop Konstant's view (Konstant was Chairman of the CEC) that

....it is not possible to determine, in any realistic way, what is the maximum proportion of non-Catholic pupils that can be accepted into a Catholic school without changing the religious nature of the school; there can be no hard and fast rule.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, Arthur's view appears to be that the distinctiveness of Catholic schools has been sabotaged by efforts to increase inclusiveness, so much so that even the Christian principles which underlie the ideals of Catholic education have been eroded as compromises have been made with secular culture.<sup>72</sup> Has that been the case?

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<sup>69</sup> Arthur J (1995). pp. 198, 202.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 213.

<sup>71</sup> (1994) quoted *ibid.* p. 213.

<sup>72</sup> Arthur J (1995) p. 225.



What has been described as the traditional model of the Roman Catholic school is essentially exclusive in nature: nurturing the children of Catholic families into the beliefs and culture of their Faith has been a persistent rather than a unique theme in Catholic education. When non-Catholic children have been admitted to the Catholic school it has often been rather more for pragmatic, than principled reasons; and even then, so research suggests, schools have tended to 'forget' that they had children who were not Catholic. What was seen by many heads, governors and clergy to be essential was the protection of the Catholic identity of the school from potential 'pollution'. Writing in 1987, Patrick Kelly, then Bishop of Salford, argued:

To open our schools to those who are not Roman Catholics, besides being deeply incompatible without massive resourcing to our claimed philosophy of education, runs the risk of undermining their character.<sup>73</sup>

From the perspective of the mid-1990s, Grace has seen a different, more subtle, kind of danger in what he described as the loss of a "relatively autonomous zone of influence" by Catholic schools:

....the space, identity and voice of contemporary Catholic schooling is now more directly challenged by market values than ever before in its history. In these circumstances the critical question for Catholic school leaders is, can a balance be found between catholic values and market values, or will market forces begin to compromise the integrity of the special mission of catholic schooling? Can Gospel values survive in the face of a more direct relationship with the market place?<sup>74</sup>

However, in more recent years:

[S]harp differences of opinion have ...emerged within the Catholic community about the policies to be pursued, and in particular about reconciling the interests and ideals of the church as a whole with the aspirations of particular Catholic schools and communities...<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted O'Keeffe B (2000). 'Fidelity and Openness', *IJER*, Vol 1.1, p. 132.

<sup>74</sup> Grace G (1995), p. 175.

<sup>75</sup> Judge H (2001), p. 235.

Some commentators have argued strongly that Catholic schools should be much more inclusive, and furthermore they have claimed that Catholic distinctiveness would not be endangered by such inclusiveness; rather it would be enhanced and fulfilled. Indeed,

...an understanding of the relationship between distinctiveness and inclusiveness offers a useful interpretative key to the nature of Catholicism.....[Furthermore] a study of the relationship between distinctiveness and inclusiveness casts light on the enterprise of Catholic education for all age groups and in every kind of setting.<sup>76</sup>

Sullivan went to the heart of the issue with a neat and evocative question: "Can one be both Catholic and catholic in the sphere of education?".<sup>77</sup> Is membership of the universal church compatible with a broad approach to education? Sullivan believes that in a secular and liberal society such a question is particularly urgent, not least because there is, actually, a lack of clarity about the purpose of Catholic state schools.<sup>78</sup> He notes twin imperatives: the church's mission to preach the gospel of eternal life, and an "equally important" imperative for Catholicism to be "open to all types of people and to all sources of truth".<sup>79</sup> This is because the gospel is not only to be proclaimed *to* all people, it is *for* all people, and must be seen to address their needs and concerns. Holding the twin imperatives in balance is essential, not least because that will "influence the acceptability of Catholic schools in a plural, mainly non-religious society." But is it possible to be both inclusive and distinctive?

Sullivan recognises the problem:

Where distinctiveness is emphasised, the integrity of faith is at stake. Catholic schools must endeavour to pass on the fullness of the faith. An undue willingness to be inclusive in the sense of accommodating the perspectives and priorities of those who cannot accept the message in its entirety might lead to a distortion of the truth and a fateful

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<sup>76</sup> Sullivan J (2001), pp. 2, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.



damaging of the salvation prospects of those pupils who have been included but misled. Where inclusiveness is stressed, the welcoming nature of faith is at issue.<sup>80</sup>

The solution is to see distinctiveness and inclusiveness as complementary rather than in opposition (or in contradiction) to each other. This can be done, he argues, by recognising two kinds of distinctiveness: the non-negotiable Catholic tradition on the one hand, and personal distinctiveness and respect for human dignity on the other. The former is to be communicated without hesitation; the latter involves welcoming and listening to 'the stranger'. This, however, does not solve the problem; it merely "relocates" it. But it relocates it to an area, so Sullivan believes, where the two can be held in a creative tension:

In the context of Catholic education, no awareness of distinctiveness is possible without awareness of difference, and no possibility of inclusiveness remains without there being a distinct body (of people and truth) to which one can belong and by which one can be included.<sup>81</sup>

Having relocated the problem, Sullivan proposes a resolution that will focus on what he believes to be the defects in the notion of a liberal education (his arguments are close to those we will consider below examining the tension between education and nurture): it fails in its over reliance on rationality to recognise the importance of tradition "in the formation of personal identity and of the community"; "schools need to find an appropriate comprehensive narrative which can direct their work" – they need a "living tradition".<sup>82</sup> That is a tradition that both challenges the person, but in doing so is itself transformed. The relationship between the tradition and the person is one of mutual effect, and so what is being offered is "both critical solidarity [belonging, commitment, distinctiveness] and critical openness [inclusiveness]".<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 34 – 35.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.



But can Catholicism be that open? More specifically, would Catholic schools be able to balance the twin imperatives?

In seeking to provide an answer to this question, Sullivan identifies what he terms “distinctive components in Catholic education”,<sup>84</sup> including the belief that “teachers should not separate religion from other aspects of school life” i.e. a “unified approach to and vision of the educational enterprise”.<sup>85</sup> All aspects of the life of the school contribute to the development of the whole person. But there is also a distinctive Catholic worldview: “an anthropology, a theology of creation, a Christology and an ecclesiology”.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, none of this implies any need for separate faith-based schooling.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, argues Sullivan, this demand is based on a belief that “metaphysics, morality and spirituality all need to be integrated into the educational process”.<sup>88</sup> Fundamental to the argument, however, is a Gospel imperative for inclusion, for “the tension within Christianity between an exclusive and an inclusive emphasis stems from the combination of the universal and the particular”.<sup>89</sup> Inclusiveness is required because the Christian story is not yet finished. There are, in any case, still poor and marginalised people for whom Christians should care, whereas the nurture school tends to provide for the “educationally rich” in a country where religion has become a “minority middle class pastime.”<sup>90</sup> Those “on the margins of acceptability” (in terms of school admissions policies) are “the semi-committed, the half-believers, the occasional participants, the lapsed or ‘resting’ church members”: inclusiveness, therefore, “forms the human soil in which the Gospel message can be sown”<sup>91</sup>. It would seem, then, that the people Sullivan

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 4, *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 90, 91.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. 125.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 137.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139, quoting Kenneth Wilson.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

(although not Kenneth Wilson) has mainly in mind are those who have had at least some connection with the Catholic (or Christian) Faith; there, at least, will be some soil with potential. Indeed, even Sullivan points out that there must be limits to admitting non-practising Catholics: that would be at the point when it would be difficult to deliver a Catholic education: “some kinds of behaviour are incompatible with [the Catholic school’s] central tenets, purpose, and atmosphere.” Furthermore

..it is not illogical [for Catholic schools] to seek to preserve their special character by ensuring that they contain a proportion of Catholic pupils which is sufficiently high to constitute a critical mass.<sup>92</sup>

Inclusion, however, is not implemented simply through admissions policies, but also in the way that the school works with other agencies in the community. But exclusivity, for Sullivan, is both anti-Catholic and anti-liberal, and is to be shunned:

Unless Catholics can show that their desire for a distinctive form of education is not vulnerable to accusations of being inward-looking, isolationist and unconcerned about the common good, their schools will neither deserve nor attract the support of a wider society.<sup>93</sup>

Elsewhere, Sullivan had identified three possible models for the Catholic school: the traditional nurture model, the service model (so far reflecting exactly the Anglican ‘twin focus’), and a prophetic model (reminiscent of Francis). This latter model would

...challenge those prevailing values and priorities of society that compete for our allegiance, for example, success and self-expression, materialism and hedonism, individualism and managerialism, sexism and racism. A Catholic education will witness to alternative values and demonstrate the possibility of a different lifestyle for those being adopted in the wider society.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* p. 140.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 176.

<sup>94</sup> Sullivan J (2000), p. 14.

But the models are not in competition; “held in tension”, they simply each bring a different slant to a common purpose. Catholic schools, then,

...can, and often do, function as constitutive communities that provide a foundation and context for the development of deep-seated and stable beliefs and values from which the wider society can benefit.<sup>95</sup>

Hypher supports this broader view, finding in the traditional model of the Catholic school:

....a somewhat stunted understanding of Catholicism leading to a loss of a true understanding of the need for evangelism, and also narrow-mindedness or even unconscious racism.<sup>96</sup>

He sees a new model emerging in the inner cities (see O’Keeffe, below) where there is a “Catholic and Christian presence at the service of all members of the local community”, which offers an “effective sacramental sign of faith in Jesus Christ to the whole community”. That model has, in fact, always been around, but up to now has existed only in overseas contexts where it takes on “mission, dialogue and the evangelisation of cultures”. What is that mission? It is simply the mission to “proclaim Christ as the source of all salvation”<sup>97</sup> and it is permanently valid. While it is important to respect the values and beliefs of other Faiths, and so dialogue comes first, it must always be followed by mission and evangelisation. In the meantime, “Catholic education should help people to live with the tension of unity and diversity until the final fulfilment.”<sup>98</sup> There seem to be two implicit questions which are unresolved in Hypher’s article: are these new types of missionary school actively taking non-Catholics in preference to (some) Catholic children, or is it simply a function of

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>96</sup> Hypher PA (1996). ‘Catholic Schools and Other Faiths’, in McLaughlin, T. H., O’Keeffe, J. and O’Keeffe, B. (1996b), p. 224.

<sup>97</sup> Barnes M (1996). ‘Catholic Schools in a World of Many Faiths: Church Teaching and Theological Perspectives’ in McLaughlin TH, O’Keeffe J and O’Keeffe B. (1996b), p. 234.

<sup>98</sup> Cooke MJG (2002). ‘Inter-Faith Perspectives: More Questions Than Answers’, in Hayes MA & Gearson L (2002). p. 200.



undersubscription in the inner city? Secondly, is Christian evangelisation of the inner city a task in which state-funded schools ought to be engaged?

O'Keeffe is an advocate of inclusion with no strings attached. Up to the 1970s there was still "a 'long way to travel' on the question of how best to fulfil the church's mission of education and service in Catholic schools in responses to the changes in society."<sup>99</sup> There were very few children of immigrant families in Catholic schools. The Catholic Commission for Racial Justice commented negatively on that fact. A Report by Cardinal Hume's Advisory Group entitled 'With you in Spirit' (1986) stated unambiguously:

There is an urgent need for those responsible in Catholic schools to put their house in order and to demonstrate to the black community that the system of education they are offering is fair and just for all God's people.<sup>100</sup>

There was, therefore, a growing determination that Catholic schools should make a direct contribution to "creating a more just and fair society". Now, she argues, Catholic schools

...have for the most part won the respect and support of the Catholic community...they face enormous challenges in living out their Catholic character and identity in the light of gospel values in our secular and plural society.<sup>101</sup>

She refers to Cardinal Hume having consistently stressed the need for Catholic schools to

....reflect afresh on the aims of Catholic education, to identify priorities and to work out initiatives which would enable them to make their own distinctive contribution to the contemporary education scene. Crucially important, is the realisation that the Catholic church must undertake its educational role within a context influence by externally-generated currents. There is an awareness of an ever-growing intrusion of the secular world into the arena of Catholic education.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> O'Keeffe B (2000). 'Fidelity and openness', *IJER*, 1.1. p. 123.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted *Ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>101</sup> O'Keefe B (1992). 'Catholic schools in an open society: the English challenge', in McClelland VA (ed.), (1992a) p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 36 – 37.

In order to face this challenge Catholic schools must develop “good practice in multicultural education, the adoption of anti-racist stances” and must face “the demands of a multi-faith intake”.<sup>103</sup> Yet there was still evidence in the CES’ analysis of OfSTED reports in 1996 that Catholic schools were

...less successful in raising awareness and understanding of other cultures in this country, and in fully integrating pupils from other cultures into the life of the school. Preparation for life in a multicultural, multifaith society is generally limited.<sup>104</sup>

O’Keeffe identifies four models of RC school: the ‘bedrock’ (Catholics only), the ‘joint school’, the ‘minimal risk school’ (Catholics and other Christians – “as high as 15%”), and the ‘urban school’. This latter was often undersubscribed, with a substantial non-Catholic intake. Referring to Durkheim’s concepts of ‘mechanistic’ and ‘organic solidarity’ (the former where there are shared beliefs and values, the latter where there are more individual differences in the mix), she links ‘mechanistic solidarity’ with the ‘bedrock’ model, and ‘organic solidarity’ with the ‘urban’ model. She then urged Catholic educationalists to take the risk of a more organic solidarity (still, in her view, a real solidarity) and establish more deliberately inter-faith RC schools, in order “to enable schools to participate in the dialogue of communities which will be essential for the future of our civilised society”.<sup>105</sup> The same point is made even more strongly elsewhere: if the Catholic school

...is to have a role in relation to the marginalised, and to the common good more generally [it cannot] ignore the diversity that is characteristic of the wider society, not least ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>106</sup>

However, writing at the beginning of the new millennium, O’Keeffe was not sanguine about the future. She perceives that there is still a strong lobby for the traditional model:

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted O’Keeffe B (2000), p. 124.

<sup>105</sup> O’Keeffe B (1992), p. 49.

<sup>106</sup> McLaughlin TH, O’Keeffe J and O’Keeffe B (1996b), p. 16.



I don't want to under estimate the task at hand. The experiences of Catholic schools suggest that bringing together the fruits of fidelity and openness into a creative tension, of 'teaching and proclaiming Christ', yet listening in dialogue and being ready to learn is a complicated and demanding process. In interpreting the task at hand, fidelity and openness need to be allies and not adversaries.<sup>107</sup>

For Zipfel issues of equality and social justice are paramount. There are three possible answers to the question: 'Who are Catholic schools for?': Catholics only; the whole community, or specifically those who are poor and marginalised. What is essential should be a concern for the "formation of social conscience and responsible world citizenship". The first of those models does not make that easy to deliver, and so this aim "tends to be a secondary priority in most of our Catholic schools". There is, therefore a "fundamental and [as yet] unresolved polarity."<sup>108</sup>

But is the Roman Catholic Church likely to heed these pleas for inclusiveness, or seek to resolve the polarity? Although O'Keeffe tried to recruit Cardinal Hume to her cause, the evidence that he was with her is not easy to find. In a lecture given to the Catholic Teachers' Federation (Birmingham, 1995) Hume made his own concerns very clear:

Recent Government policy has repeatedly stressed the importance of parental preferences, and yet present [financial] restrictions effectively deny many practising Catholic parents the *right* to a Catholic education for their children. This is an unacceptable situation.....Catholic parents should not be denied access to Catholic schools.<sup>109</sup>

He was absolutely clear as to why Catholic parents should have access to Catholic schools:

The truths of our faith have to be communicated and we have to know what the church teaches.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> O'Keeffe B (2000), p. 132.

<sup>108</sup> Zipfel R (1996) 'Who Do We Serve and What Do We Offer? Race, Equality and Catholic Schools', in McLaughlin TH, O'Keeffe J and O'Keeffe B (eds) (1996a), p. 215.

<sup>109</sup> Hume B (1997a). p. 26. My italics.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.



Catholic schools, then, are still there to transmit the Faith. Haldane, having described a traditional view of Catholic schools, interrogated this model with the simple, yet sharp, question: what of social justice? Is not the traditionally conceived aim “exclusivist...undesirable and impractical”? Possibly so, he says, but in the final analysis the main vocation of humanity is to love God; for “we exist for the sake of God’s glory”. This, he acknowledges, is an exclusivist claim, and as such incompatible with secularity and other religions, but nevertheless that is the situation, like it or not:

The primary function of Catholic schools is to transmit Catholic truths and Catholic values. Everything else, no matter how important, is secondary to this.<sup>111</sup>

When, furthermore, during the political debate inspired by the Dearing Report, the argument was being advanced that all faith schools ought to be inclusive, the response from the Roman Catholic Church was, as noted above, somewhat negative. The point was made by Oona Stannard,<sup>112</sup> the Director of the CES, that the only way more non-Catholics could be admitted to Catholic schools, would be through building more schools. But that could not be afforded, and the alternative: “Rejecting even more Catholics from the places they have funded and nurtured over so many years,” which would undoubtedly “cause considerable pain”, would not, by implication, be found acceptable. In other words it would seem, as late as 2001, that the principle of priority to Catholics was still firm, at least so far as the official voice of the RC church was concerned, and despite the voices within the church arguing for greater inclusivity. Even some of those voices were qualified with either a concern that there should not be too many non-Catholics, or with the intention of using the school as a mission field, ripe for harvest.

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<sup>111</sup> Haldane J (1996) ‘Catholic Education and Catholic Identity’, in McLaughlin TH, O’Keefe J and O’Keefe B (eds). (1996a), p. 135.

<sup>112</sup> *TES* 8/2/02, p. 6.

Furthermore, while the Catholic Bishops may have expressed approval of schools which have “a particular concern for students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds” and “the needs of members of other religious faiths in particular”,<sup>113</sup> there would seem to be a limit to what a church can do which has such a clear view of the superiority of its Orders and its Sacraments over those (at least) of the Protestant churches. In addition, its positive post-Vatican II view of other Faiths owes more to an inclusivist than to a pluralist theology,<sup>114</sup> and as noted above, may be judged to be somewhat patronising for that. There is still no acceptance that all Christians, let alone all Faiths, are on equal footing when it comes to matters of salvation.<sup>115</sup> This would seem to imply a concept of the Catholic school where non-Catholics would inevitably be second class citizens. As one Catholic educationalist has put it:

If Catholic education is to reflect these central and enduring claims to objectivity and their sustaining arguments then it must not shy away from embodying them in the teaching and learning within particular schools. Further it must also bring them into dialogue with the wider community, even where this may seem to be in conflict with the temper of the times.<sup>116</sup>

Here the concept of dialogue does not appear to connote an open two-way conversation.

Despite these theoretical difficulties, it is quite clear that that Catholic schools today

....exhibit diversity and pluralism and display a wide range of original syntheses in their response to the ideas and values that compete for their allegiance. The richness offered by this diversity and originality derives in part from resources at the heart of the Catholic

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<sup>113</sup> McLaughlin TH (1999). ‘Distinctiveness and the Catholic School: Balanced Judgement and the Temptations of Commonality’, in Conroy JC (1999a), p. 65.

<sup>114</sup> For the exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist paradigms, see D’Costa G (1986) *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford, Blackwell.

<sup>115</sup> For a useful examination of RC attitudes to other Faiths, see Knitter PF (1985). *No Other Name?*, London, SCM Press, pp. 120 – 144; “The Catholic model thus provides us with a final focus on a question, a recurring stumbling block...[in that it] recognises both revelation and salvation outside Christ and Christianity; it admits that Christ need not be considered the constitutive cause, the sole vehicle of God’s saving love in the world. It continues to affirm, however, that Christ must be proclaimed as the fullest revelation, the definitive saviour, the norm above all other norms for all religions. This, they say, is as far as Christians can go. To move beyond this point is to jeopardise the distinctiveness, the essence, of Christianity”. *Ibid.* p. 142.

<sup>116</sup> Carr D ‘Catholic Faith and Religious Truth’, in Conroy JC (ed), (1999a), p. 186.

faith and in part from the sheer multiplicity in the cultural contexts, socio-economic circumstances and alternative ideologies that surround schools.<sup>117</sup>

Writing as recently as 2002, Grace provides a view of the state of contemporary Catholic education. On the surface, he argues, the future looks bright (this is symbolised by the Blairs' personal blessing on the sector!); Catholic schools are buoyant and successful, but

...analysis at the deep structure level prevents the development of triumphalism about Catholic schooling and encourages, instead, thoughtful reflection about its visible success, and more systematic research into the changing culture of Catholic schooling.<sup>118</sup>

Grace quotes the 1988 publication of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: 'The Catholic School', which he regards as a "fundamental call to be of service to the poor (in economic, family and spiritual terms)" which has been "a powerful constituent of the culture of Catholic schooling" since Vatican II. The problem, as he sees it, is that in recent years all schools have faced the challenges of the educational market place and the inevitable competition imposed by examination league tables:

These developments do not articulate easily with Catholic values in education, where spiritual and moral culture is given precedence over material success, where education is seen as a service not a product, and where notions of the common good and of the well-being of community initiatives take precedence over individual self-interest.<sup>119</sup>

He is critical of Arthur's analysis which, he claims, has led to fears among Catholics that their schools were in danger of being swamped by a multi-Faith pluralism. That analysis has been seen by others as being "based upon a golden-age construct of Catholicity in the past and a too pessimistic reading of the different forms that Catholicity can take in contemporary schooling."<sup>120</sup> However, he judges, the traditional model is alive and well:

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<sup>117</sup> Sullivan J (2000), p. ix.

<sup>118</sup> Grace G (2002b) 'Catholic Education in England and Wales', in Hayes MA. & Gearson L (2002), p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.



There is a wariness in the English Catholic community about greater openness and the possibility of inter-faith schools. The historical legacy of the citadel school (as a bulwark against enemies of the Faith) and of triumphalist truth claims (against the truth claims of other Faiths) is far from exhausted.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, he wants to affirm a more general rationale:

...to keep alive and to renew the culture of the sacred in a profane and secular world.<sup>122</sup>

This is a much less exclusive aim than those which were quoted at the beginning of this section, and this new kind of discourse would accord not only with a Christian ecumenical school ('Domestic 2'), but also with a religious foundation prepared to embrace all Faiths ('Domestic 3'). However, we have already considered the question as to whether, even if it is possible to be 'generally religious', it is coherent to describe someone as 'generally Christian'. My answer was in the negative. How much more difficult would it be to be 'generally Catholic'? While the intention to establish a school that is religious rather than secular is a worthy aim in itself within a diverse educational system, it is difficult to imagine what this 'sacred' school would be like. What form might worship take? What particular values and beliefs would undergird the school's Foundation? As we have seen above, an attempt to establish a formal inter-Faith school in London floundered essentially due to the particularity of Faiths; indeed, some of the problems faced by formally joint Anglican/Catholic schools point to the essentially discrete identities that exist even within one Faith. At present it would not seem likely that the Catholic hierarchy would want to go so far as sponsoring a Domestic 3-type.

The specific issues associated with the joint Catholic-Anglican school (a more limited 'Domestic 2' model)<sup>123</sup> cannot be ignored, and they and their associated problems have been

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Grace G (2002a). p. 5.

closely examined by Priscilla Chadwick.<sup>124</sup> Focusing on two joint schools, one (where she had worked as Head of RE) St Bede's Redhill, and the other, Lagan College, in the quite different context of Northern Ireland, Chadwick examines the question: 'Is there a common view of Christian education within an Anglican and Roman Catholic framework in England?'. She concludes:

There is probably a broad consensus among Roman Catholic and Anglican educationalists that it is the life of a church school to be and to be seen to be Christian in its ethos and values....[they] agree on the proposition that in a depersonalising world the Christian school has something crucially important to say to both Christians and non-Christians....[they] have much in common over against the predominant culture of liberal secular humanism in British society. Both share a sense of Christian mission which has the potential to transcend denominational boundaries. Yet for historical, theological and cultural reasons they have tended to emphasise their differences....<sup>125</sup>

She draws an interesting contrast between the pressures on Anglican schools in an increasingly secular society to become more distinctively Christian, and the post-Vatican II 'pressure' for Catholic schools to move away from a "too narrow catechetical model to embrace greater personal autonomy and freedom of conscience....."<sup>126</sup>, but of course the contrast is somewhat false, because it deals with two different factors. Had the impact of Vatican II meant that Catholic schools were opening up rather more to non-Catholics, while Anglicans were becoming more exclusive, then the point would have been well made. But as we have seen, that is hardly the case in the Catholic sector, which despite voices for inclusion, still holds fast to the traditional nurture model. Rightly so, is the argument of this thesis! Indeed, even in the joint-school enterprise, Chadwick tells us (somewhat sorrowfully, one imagines):

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<sup>123</sup> Brown AS (1988a). 'Church, School and Ecumenism', in McClelland VA (1988a) questions whether joint schools, in the ways they separate children from each other on denominational lines, are actually ecumenical schools at all. pp. 38ff.

<sup>124</sup> Chadwick P (1994).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.



It cannot be said...that joint Catholic/Anglican schools are something Roman Catholic authority necessarily wishes to encourage; rather they are to be tolerated *faute de mieux* when the alternative is no Catholic education at all in a particular place.<sup>127</sup>

So what are the prospects for the further development of this model? Suffice it to say that while there were only 8 such schools in the early 1990s, and Cardinal Hume regarded them as a possible model for the future,<sup>128</sup> increasing secondary school rolls from the mid-1990s have done much to reveal the fragility of the expedient rationales which seem to underlie such joint foundations.<sup>129</sup> This has been recently illustrated by the fate of the joint CE/RC school in Oxford (St Augustine of Canterbury), which has now become a single faith RC school.<sup>130</sup> Here pragmatism was alive and well, for it was “an anticipated change in the conditions of the market [which] led...to a withdrawal from such cooperation”.<sup>131</sup> While there were not enough Catholic children to fill a school, cooperation was expedient; once enough Catholic children were available, then the single Faith nurture model was preferred. It might even be thought to be the case, that because of the greater emphasis on Faith identity and doctrinal/liturgical orthodoxy within that church, the Roman Catholic school would have much more in common with (say) an Islamic school, or a Christian evangelical school, than it has with a CE school. In this sense the CE ‘faith school’ model is quite distinctive. However, these more recent calls for a broader and more inclusive approach to Catholic education would, if taken seriously by the church, bring the Catholic model much closer to the (official) Anglican model.

Firstly, there is implied a more positive commitment to ecumenical partnership, both formal and informal, which would fit well with the Domestic 2 model i.e. either the CE or the RC church sponsoring schools which would be interdenominational in their admissions, although

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

<sup>128</sup> Hume B (1988) p. 111.

<sup>129</sup> Arthur J (1995) pp. 226-227.

<sup>130</sup> Gilpin E ‘Church schools in a Pluralistic Society’, *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads*, Issue 13, Feb 2004, pp. 9 – 17.

<sup>131</sup> Judge H (2001) p. 233.



with a particular (as opposed to a joint) Foundation provided by one of those churches. Secondly, concern for service to the community, particularly the disadvantaged in the community would be a common aim. Of course, the thrust of this thesis has been to argue (in terms of the provision of schools) against this latter, anachronistic and somewhat impractical, aim. As to the former rationale, that would only be possible for a church which was prepared to move from a single (Domestic 1) approach to its schools, into the broader provision of a (non-denominational) Christian education. That, despite some of the developments that are occurring within particular Catholic schools,<sup>132</sup> would presently seem to present insuperable theological and ecclesiological problems for the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet in an age where all churches (to a greater or lesser extent) recognise the imperative for ecumenism, one might have thought that Hume was on the right path in what he was proposing; after all:

[W]hen one considers that many Anglicans and other Protestants have an understanding of Christian education which is altogether closer to the 'holistic' model than that advocated by many 'progressive' Catholics, there is obviously potential for renewed ecumenical discussion on the possibility of further joint schools in an education system which is suspicious of absolute commitment, antagonistic to religious nurture and which encourages a liberalising relativism.<sup>133</sup>

A similar plea was made by Chadwick, as an Anglican, writing in the last days of the Tory Government:

It might be that the Conservative government's drive to offer parents a wide diversity in their choice of school as customers in the education 'market-place' encouraged the view of church schools as one particular 'brand-name product' among others....Alternative markets might be schools run by 'new religious movements', Muslims or the Seventh-day Adventists.....The greater autonomy given to individual schools, rather than creating a narrow 'ghetto' mentality, may encourage more ecumenical co-operation than would

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<sup>132</sup> McLaughlin TH (1999). 'Distinctiveness and the Catholic School: Balanced Judgement and the Temptations of Commonality', in Conroy JC (1999a), p. 65.

<sup>133</sup> Arthur J (1995) p. 227.

previously have been possible in dioceses where Episcopal influence has brought ecumenical dialogue to a standstill. Even where relationships between local Anglican and Roman Catholic schools have been cordial but held on a tight rein from the top, governing bodies might find that the greater freedom given to them under legislation could enable them to build more ecumenical bridges.<sup>134</sup>

If that was the view from the mid-1990s, (which it will be noted included an endorsement of a broader ecumenical role for church schools, if not an implied *imprimatur* for the single Faith model) and apparently, despite the Oxford experience, the impetus for formal joint schools has not disappeared entirely,<sup>135</sup> perhaps now is the time to suggest that such a vision and such potential could be best realised not by joint Anglican/RC schools (because that concept hardly seems to have much of a future if the preferred model of the Roman Catholic Church is ultimately that which has been designated ‘Domestic 1’, and it is noteworthy that, in the book quoted above, Dr Chadwick, a great advocate of joint schools, does not go so far as to recommend that specific model for the future) but by CE ‘Domestic 2’ schools. Such a model, however, would seem unlikely to appeal to the Catholic authorities, because such schools would certainly not have a ‘pure’ Roman Catholic ethos. Perhaps, then, the answer is for the RC church also to build on the ‘Domestic 2’ model? That would lead to the development of Christian schools with (in traditional language) either a Catholic or a Protestant ethos; and probably some (for that is the nature of the Church of England) which bridge that divide. While that would provide a much broader Faith base for a school, it would not be quite so vague as Grace’s ‘sacred’ model.

### **Nurture and Education**

This leads us helpfully to a consideration of what might (or should) be the work of this single Faith (Christian Domestic 2) nurture school, with particular reference to the twin concepts of

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<sup>134</sup> Chadwick P (1997) pp. 144, 145, 148.

<sup>135</sup> *Church Times*, 16/4/04. Report by Margaret Holness on the proposal for a new joint RC/Anglican School for Wrexham which will “create the first Anglican secondary school places in north Wales”. p. 3.



Christian nurture and Christian education. It would seem both uncontroversial and axiomatic that the main purpose of the nurture school (apart from providing an excellent education) is to nurture (feed, nourish, support, bring to maturity)<sup>136</sup> the child in the Faith. This involves “initiation....into the Christian world view with its particular beliefs, values and sentiments.”<sup>137</sup> But that role does not operate in isolation. The Faith school is one of three partners, working alongside the church (or other Faith) community and the home (“as a faith community also”).<sup>138</sup> In this role the school may be seen by some as the lesser partner, although it is possible for it to become the more influential. Few would argue against the proposition that the main responsibility for the Christian/religious nurture of a child lies jointly with the parents and the church/Faith community. In fact, argued Cardinal Hume,

...parents are the first and primary educators of their children...Education is much more than schooling, and parents cannot delegate their own role to the school....[Furthermore]...no Catholic school, however strong a caring community it is, can substitute for a loving home....Schools cannot be expected to inculcate what is ignored or denied in the home”.<sup>139</sup>

It is to the church that the parents bring the child for baptism (and it is being assumed in what follows that they do so for genuinely religious reasons), and the church promises to “uphold” the parents in the promises they make on behalf of the child. The local church may then provide a number of opportunities for the child to grow in faith: Sunday School, Choir, Altar Server, Youth Groups etc. Undergirding this will be family church attendance. The parent may then seek a school which reflects the values and beliefs of the home, in order to support and reinforce what the child receives through home and church. It is at this point that the church school enters the picture, and will develop its own special nurturing role with the child.

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<sup>136</sup> Thiessen EJ (1993), p. 26.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>138</sup> May PR (1988). ‘Church, Family and School’, in McClelland VA (1988a). p. 15.

<sup>139</sup> Hume B (1997a). pp. 27, 28.



So clearly the role of the parent is crucial, both directly (to include both the explicit and implicit teaching they give) and indirectly (how they support - or not - other partners). But in fact the educational partnership is even larger. The state works in partnership with individual families via the formal education system. The state itself is also in formal partnership with other organisations, most notably religious bodies. Society also offers - for better or worse - other educators of children: religious communities, the media, the prevailing culture and ethos, peer groups, and so on. The fact that some of these 'educators' may be 'leading out'<sup>140</sup> youngsters in the wrong direction makes it even more important that the primary educators of children do an effective job.

It must be recognised that the process of education never operates in a vacuum. The child is, at least as far as schools are concerned, never a blank slate on which a template can be drawn: the Jesuit adage simply recognises that one partner in the process may have a heavy, even overwhelming influence, but neither church nor school is working from scratch. Neither is the educational context value free. In fact, all education is based on certain givens, and those givens include a values context of some kind. So when the Chief Executive of the QCA said of society: "I'm not sure whether....we do know what we value",<sup>141</sup> that may well be honest and true, but many people would also find it very worrying. That is why it is so important that those who take on the responsibility of being educators of children, do so with a clear awareness of the values context they are providing. That may be seen to be one of the advantages of schools with a religious foundation. Their contribution will have a coherent world view and values system, which may not always be accessible in a system based on more transient political trends, or the domination of particular social groups.

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<sup>140</sup> 'Education' derives from the supine of the Latin verb 'educare', which has the basic meaning of 'training', which word connotes inputting skills etc. which are not already there; however, the Latin 'educere', meaning 'to lead out', 'to bring out', implies the eliciting of something which is already there, and may be thought to represent a more creative understanding of the educational process.

<sup>141</sup> 'What Is Education For?', Kings College London, 5th Annual Education Lecture, November 1998.

In introducing this section I have referred to the “twin concepts of Christian nurture and Christian education”. It is essential that we are not only as precise as we can be in defining our terminology in this complex debate, but also that we focus on the correct issues:

Thus it is right and necessary that the traditional reverence for state, church and school, be replaced by a reverent and critical examination of the nature of society, faith and education, and the relationships that exist between them.<sup>142</sup>

A variety of terminology is presently in use, and has been usefully mapped (“a cartographer’s nightmare?”) by Astley and Day.<sup>143</sup> Christian education “can be applied either to processes of Christian formation or to the intellectual development of a critical evaluation of the Christian faith”<sup>144</sup> and they note Hull’s warning about confusion existing between (a) processes and means, (b) approach and philosophy, and (c) curriculum content. They themselves identify five different ways of understanding the term: Christian formation/nurture (mainly Hull’s category (a)); Christian self-criticism/critical openness (evaluation and analysis); curriculum Christianity (Hull’s category (c)); the Christian mind (Hull’s category (b)); and the Christian curriculum (a Christian approach to general education). They warn: “There are clearly important differences in aim, content and method between these different understandings of Christian education”.<sup>145</sup>

Seymour has examined the way the concept of Christian education has been understood, identifying six “distinct approaches”: religious instruction, socialisation/enculturation, developmental, liberation, educational system, and interpretation approaches.<sup>146</sup> The arguments range between those who see Christian education simply as part of a general

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<sup>142</sup> Rodger AR (1982) p. 10.

<sup>143</sup> Astley J and Day D (1992). ‘The Contours of Christian Education’, in Astley and Day (1992) pp. 13 – 25.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> Seymour JL (1979). ‘Contemporary approaches to Christian education’, in Astley et al (eds) (1996) pp. 3 – 13.

education where the main aim is to transmit knowledge, through an emphasis on the transmission of faith and lifestyle (where the Christian community, and its life, is all-important), to a greater emphasis being placed on personal and/or community development, and finally the need to be able to interpret 'faith for today'. Within this range one particular approach locates Christian education within the educational system (in this case the US system), where one problem is clearly identified. It lies in the

...separation of the church school from the mission of the church and from other goal-task areas of the church's life; therefore, education is prohibited from properly performing its function of enabling the mission of the church.....when the relationship of formal church school education is not co-ordinated with the other education agencies in the church and where the responsibility of the education task in the life of the church remains unclear.<sup>147</sup>

Whilst the American context is not directly relevant to this study, and the focus is not actually on the church school as a separate institution, but on church-run Sunday Schools, the lesson is easily transferable: whatever else Christian education is, and whoever 'delivers' it, it must be located, somehow, in the life and mission of the church. Astley and Day emphasise that however the term Christian education is defined, the activity "must be part of the teaching activity of the church....."<sup>148</sup> For Stanley Hauerwas "the church is a form of education that is religious."<sup>149</sup> This underlines not only the fact that the provision of Christian education is fundamentally the church's task, whether through church schools, or any other mode of delivery, but it also confirms that the work of church schools is an aspect of the work of the church itself. The relationship between the church school and the church is a central issue. Is the church school to be in any way identified with the church, or is it simply a part or aspect of the church?

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>148</sup> Astley J and Day D (1992) p. 20.

<sup>149</sup> Hauerwas S (1985). 'The gesture of a truthful story', in Astley J, Francis LJ and Crowder C (1996). p. 97.



Within the Church of England the position of church schools is certainly affirmed: they lie “at the centre of the church’s mission....” While it has been argued above that the problem with this affirmation is knowing precisely what it means, nevertheless, the way that CE schools are embedded in the educational system in this country, and the structural position of the church itself (particularly, but not exclusively, through the work of the Diocesan Boards), does mean that there is not the degree of separation and the lack of ‘joined-up thinking’ described above. On the one hand CE schools are a part of the general provision of schools (although the provision is sparse in some areas of the country), and as such are required to be the same, in most respects, as any other school e.g. teach the National Curriculum, provide teachers with the same pay and conditions of service etc. Indeed, the dilemma often arises in the appointment of staff as to whether a committed Christian, yet mediocre teacher, should be preferred over an extremely good teacher, but one who lacks Christian commitment. In the end, it is likely that heads and governors will opt for the latter, because the ‘core business’ of the institution is to provide an excellent education. On the other hand, however, it is clearly recognised that church schools should be distinctive, and the main area of distinctiveness will be in the religious life of the school, reflected in worship, in the quality and extent of its RE provision, in its ‘hidden curriculum’, and also in the approach to the general curriculum. This is the ‘stick of rock’ analogy.

So far as this chapter is concerned, and in view of ‘Dearing’s’ use of the term ‘nurture’ (equivalent to the ‘Durham’ term ‘domestic’), while recognising that the distinctions are rather more subtle than this, I shall be using the term ‘nurture’ to denote the general process of Christian formation (in which parent, church, and church school work in partnership), and the term ‘Christian education’ to denote the particular contribution of the church school. This

latter designation will include what the school has to offer as a distinctive Christian community engaged in education.

However, is the concept of 'Christian Education' itself coherent? Is it not actually (as Hirst argued)<sup>150</sup> a contradiction in terms? Are not nurture and education diametrically opposed? Education is the process by which we are provided with the tools to enable us to become what we have it in us to be; it provides the maps and guidebooks for life's pilgrimage (to use a specifically religious image), and so on. As noted above, the process may be understood (taking some liberties, as we have seen, with the Latin root) to be all about '*leading out*'. Taking a child and leading her out onto the road to authentic, autonomous and responsible adulthood. Nurture, surely, connotes a more inward journey; one where the guide takes a much more positive, and possibly protective, role in the process, and where the destination is assumed in the process? Thiessen addresses the dilemma directly, and concludes that

...it is logically possible for Christian nurture to satisfy the ideas of a defensible form of liberal education.<sup>151</sup>

Problems arise, claims Thiessen, only when 'religious schools' (he writes from an American context) become "breeding grounds for fanaticism and intolerance" rather than exhibiting "healthy commitment", which should be the goal of all proper education.<sup>152</sup> Of course,

It is true that teaching for commitment can foster these perversions, but it need not. And we must not let the fear of such perversions make us miss out on the benefits of healthy commitment. Love has its perversions too, but we do not let this stop us from praising the virtues of love.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Hirst PH (1972) 'Christian education: a contradiction in terms' *Learning for Living*, 11, 4 pp. 6 – 11. For a full discussion of, and response to, Hirst's challenge see Francis LJ (1983) 'The logic of education, theology, and the church school', in Francis LJ & Thatcher A (eds). (1990), pp. 20 – 35, and Thiessen EJ (1985). 'In defence of a distinctively Christian curriculum', *ibid.* pp. 83 – 92, where the underlying problem is seen to be "showing exactly how religion can be integrated with other forms of knowledge". p. 87

<sup>151</sup> Thiessen EJ (1993), p. 207.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* p. 277.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* p. 276.



The alternative of teaching for commitment, is “the hell of non-commitment”, from which children deserve to be spared.<sup>154</sup> As we shall see, the issue of commitment become particularly crucial when considering the teaching of religious education.

Astley suggests, in fact, that the traditional distinction between nurture and education should be more ‘blurred’, at least in relation to the specific contrast between “secular religious education about Christianity and Christian formative education (or nurture).” This is because account must be taken of “the element of feeling”:

The nature of feeling...and the way in which it is known – which includes a partly private, introspective element – should give us pause before drawing too sharply the lines of demarcation between secular religious education and religious nurture in the cases of those religions where feeling is a central component [e.g. Christianity].<sup>155</sup>

So when, for example, children are studying Christianity in ‘secular’ RE, they will not understand the Christian Faith without “some element of development of those feelings (with, of course, reflection on them) that are also components of Christian attitudes, emotions, experiences, and evaluation, and concomitants of Christian beliefs and action”.<sup>156</sup> Therefore

[P]henomenological teaching about religion may in principle be said to overlap with religious formation in the sense that it too produces religious attributes, that is, implicitly and characteristically religious feelings.<sup>157</sup>

Nevertheless, Christian education/nurture and RE are different activities and should not be confused,<sup>158</sup> although for Astley that difference is one of degree rather than kind. He points out that those who call for ‘more teaching on Christianity in our schools’ “very often have in

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* p. 277. Here Thiessen quotes Smedes’ ‘Care and Commitment’.

<sup>155</sup> Astley J (1994), p. 96.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 96 – 97.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97.

<sup>158</sup> RE as a discrete curriculum area is considered below.



mind the learning of such implicitly Christian attributes such as compassion, responsibility, trust, care and awe.....”<sup>159</sup> Others take a less charitable view:

...in Britain today politicians often wish religious education in schools to be reinforced precisely in order to engender moral order in what appears to be an increasingly anomic society.<sup>160</sup> Yet religious educationalists themselves often reject such a functionalist understanding of their subject.<sup>161</sup>

In speeches ministers and politicians have linked the loss of religion with the rise in juvenile crime. Religions on this view makes children more law-abiding (and churches and religious educators can be blamed for failing to exert the positive influences open to them).<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, Astley argues, there are certain commonalities in the aims of Christian education and secular RE, such as the encouragement of a personal quest and the development of moral character. This view is echoed by Rodger:

...there is a close kinship between the open dialogue within a free society and the dialogue which takes place within a Christian community. There is both a recognition of human beings as under obligation to what transcends present understanding – a calling, so to speak, to bring believing, valuing and (therefore) living under the authority of a transcendent obligation.<sup>163</sup>

So ‘Christian education’ is neither incoherent nor is it self-contradictory, although we must recognise that this latter danger is ever present, as Francis pointed out in his consideration of the “tension between mission and nurture”,<sup>164</sup> or as Miranda argued in the 80s: “....much work has to be done in explicating [the meaning of ‘Christian Education’] and arguing for its acceptance in the light of current understanding about education and the transmission of

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<sup>159</sup> Astley J (1994), p. 98.

<sup>160</sup> This may be compared with the thinking behind the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act: “A deeper but more diffuse influence was a desire to protect the values underlying liberal democracy...Traditionally [moral values] had been linked to religious beliefs, and there was a widespread, diffuse and often muddle-headed assumption that this was still the case.” Cox E (1983), p. 7.

<sup>161</sup> Gill R (1996), p. 103.

<sup>162</sup> Thatcher A (1996). p. 137.

<sup>163</sup> Rodger AR (1982) p. 22.

<sup>164</sup> *International Journal of Education and Religion*, Vol 1 (2000) pp. 116-117.

knowledge”.<sup>165</sup> Fundamentally it would seem to be more about providing a specific context for the delivery of the tools by which (in Christian terms) we become what God has called us to be, rather than a specific knowledge content. It is that context which should make church schools distinctive.

Reference has already been made to ‘hidden curriculum’, and the concept has also been helpfully explored by Astley,<sup>166</sup> where he describes it as “a set of learning experiences that are tacit, implicit, informal and (usually) unstructured”.<sup>167</sup> Astley quotes John Westerhoff with evident approbation: “My conviction is that this hidden curriculum, this unconscious learning, is so important we cannot afford to let it remain unconscious”.<sup>168</sup> This is the part of the iceberg which lies under the water, one which (to continue the metaphor) if ignored will do the most damage. Although this curriculum has not been deliberately hidden, it is important to search it out. It is particularly important for teachers, because they need to know what they are doing; it is, Astley claims, less important for pupils to be able to recognise it. Indeed, it may actually be undesirable, because there may be “certain learning situations where an insistence on explicit articulation of all learning can only disable it.”<sup>169</sup> A similar danger is to be found in the analysis of certain types of religious discourse, particularly myth, where a too searching critical scrutiny can destroy the power of the myth to communicate its meaning. There is a sense in which one has to live the myth in order to be able to comprehend it. Similarly, there are aspects of the hidden curriculum which can only be lived. Astley points here to Polanyi’s notion of “tacit knowledge”, where “there are things of which we are focally aware only

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<sup>165</sup> Miranda EO (1986), p. 101.

<sup>166</sup> Astley J (1992). ‘Christian Worship and the Hidden Curriculum of Christian Learning’, in Astley J & Day D (eds) (1992), pp. 141 – 152.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 141.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p. 142.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146.



through our subsidiary awareness of other things.”<sup>170</sup> Those who argue for the pupil’s rational autonomy (the ‘educational liberals’) need, urges Astley, be cautious, for

...rational autonomy is only one among many elements in the life of a properly educated, and particularly the properly religiously educated, person. ‘Unbridled lucidity’ is not an unqualified educational virtue, at least not in Christian education.<sup>171</sup>

But is this not to allow indoctrination to infect the life of the school, for, as Thiessen notes, “Christian nurture is frequently subject to the charge of indoctrination”?<sup>172</sup> He makes the point that in the USA, Canada and the UK school-based religious education used to have a clearly confessional aim. For England one only needs to read the Agreed Syllabuses which appeared during the 1940s, 50s and 60s (the West Riding Syllabus<sup>173</sup> became the classic,<sup>174</sup> and much copied, example) to recognise that was indeed the case,<sup>175</sup> and that, furthermore, the greatest proportion of RE teaching was dedicated to the study of the Bible. Indeed, back in those days there was a general expectation that all schools<sup>176</sup> would deliver a Christian (based) education. Michell has described the years up to 1960s as “the era of educational evangelism”,<sup>177</sup> and as Cox notes:

There was a time when a teacher would have been proud to be described as a good indoctrinator...For an indoctrinator was originally one who imparted doctrine, and doctrine, when used in the meaning implied by its classical roots, is only another word for teaching. So to be an indoctrinator was to be a successful teacher. It was, however, taken for granted that the doctrine was true, and that the teacher was not trying to impart ideas that were false.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146 – 147.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 147.

<sup>172</sup> Thiessen EJ (1991). ‘Christian Nurture, Indoctrination and Liberal Education’, in Astley & Day (1992) pp. 66 – 86.

<sup>173</sup> 1966; [for children aged 4 – 7 years] “The school will introduce children to beautiful things, growing things and living things, thus helping them to be aware of the wonder of life and to worship its Creator.”. p. 8.

<sup>174</sup> Hull JM (1975b), in Smart N & Horder D (eds) (1975). p. 101.

<sup>175</sup> So, for example, the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (i.e. that of the secular LEA) tells teachers that the effect of their teaching might “only be gauged by the love of God, which is inculcated, together with its corollary, love to our neighbours”. Cornwall Education Committee (1944) *Supplement to the Cornish Syllabus of Religious Education*, p. 8.

<sup>176</sup> Levitt M (1995) p. 101.

<sup>177</sup> Michell C (1984), p. 82.

<sup>178</sup> Cox E (1983), p. 101.



Thiessen thus reminds us that the term ‘indoctrination’, originally used virtually as a synonym for education, became strongly negative for educators; indeed, it came to represent everything that was antithetical to a liberal education; that is, an education which had as its core values individuality, freedom, autonomy, rationality, and tolerance.<sup>179</sup>

Thiessen, however, subjects the related concepts of indoctrination and liberal education to a detailed critique, culminating in his proposal for a

....more holistic and developmental concept of liberal education [which] will lead to a rather different definition of ‘indoctrination’.<sup>180</sup>

Taking the “core idea” of indoctrination to refer to “the curtailment of a person’s growth towards normal rational autonomy”, he argues because ‘normal’ rationality is neither “complete independence [n]or perfect rationality”, then

....initiation into the present and the particular is a necessary phase of a person’s growth towards rational autonomy and therefore the charge of indoctrination is not applicable to this stage of development.<sup>181</sup>

In other words, the traditional liberal view fails to take account of the developmental process, and assumes that the provision of a liberal education is a pure activity, unsullied by any transmission of pre-formed beliefs or values. This assumption is to replicate the mistake of those engaged in the 1970s educational thinking (quite a strong thread in the School Council’s Humanities projects, including RE and History) who argued that the teacher was simply a neutral provider of education, counselling teachers against expressing any of their own opinions to their pupils.<sup>182</sup> The child was seen, at least implicitly, as a blank template ready to

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<sup>179</sup> Thiessen EJ (1991) p. 67. For Hull, “indoctrination and education are mutually exclusive”. Article on ‘Indoctrination’ in Sutcliffe JM (ed) (1984), pp. 166 – 168.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, the article on ‘Neutrality’ by Edward Hulmes in Sutcliffe JM (ed) (1984), pp. 242 – 243.

soak up neutral facts, about which she would then make up her own mind. Indeed, the idea that left to herself, the child will always be able to make up her own mind, has been used by parents to justify their 'non-interference' in their child's religious upbringing (such parents are, Thiessen argues, actually indoctrinating).<sup>183</sup> The truth is that values/beliefs intervention in the child's developmental process (he describes this as the "initiation/socialization/transmission component") is a proper role for parents (and, we might add, the faith community and the faith school).

So having developed this concept of 'normal rational autonomy', Thiessen argues a case for active Christian nurture which will not undermine personal autonomy. Firstly, he urges

....initiate boldly. Christian parents should not sell the Christian birth-right of their children for a mess of liberal pottage.<sup>184</sup>

In particular Christian schools and colleges will be places which support the development of faith, and where they must be "a systematic, serious and orderly initiation into the study of the Christian tradition".<sup>185</sup> This is no different from the normal educative process into "the human inheritance", for neither can, nor should, that be a neutral process. So far as specifically Christian nurture is concerned, the goal must still be to maintain "normal autonomy". Parents (church, church school) may hope that the outcome is a choice for faith, but this must not be forced – that would be indoctrination. So,

....although their children ....are brought up within a context of Christian commitment, they will be taught and nurtured towards an eventual 'independent' choice for or against Christian commitment.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Thiessen EJ (1991) p. 81. Conversely, McLaughlin argues, there is "a non-indoctrinatory form of religious upbringing which a liberal can in good conscience claim a right to offer to his or her child." McLaughlin, T.H. (1984). 'Parental rights and the religious upbringing of children', in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1994), p. 181.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* p. 79.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.



This involves the child being encouraged to take an initial step of faith commitment, but that step is recognised by all involved as being temporary at that stage. The time will come when the child will have to make up her mind for herself. Interestingly, so far as this thesis is concerned, Thiessen remarks that this principle “calls into question the continuing practice of infant baptism in many Christian churches”. If baptism is to be the true (and single) mark of commitment and initiation, then, he argues, that children “need to mature towards normal rational autonomy before they make any *firm* commitments”. The obvious conclusion is that baptism should be delayed until the child has reached this stage of development, and is able to take serious decisions.

The process of Christian nurture, therefore, is not indoctrinational in a pejorative sense, for it need not endanger normal rational autonomy. It should not prevent positive cognitive growth; indeed, it allows a proper balance to be maintained between cognitive and affective development. More specifically, it allows (perhaps encourages) the fostering of “honest and serious grappling with doubts, questions and objections to Christian convictions”.<sup>187</sup> It should also involve positive consideration of alternative religious and world views. However, the general education provided by a Christian school or college

....should not be thought of as precluding the interpretation of these forms of knowledge as a revelation of God’s truth. For the Christian, all truth is God’s truth and needs to be taught as such.<sup>188</sup>

This is just another reminder that education is never delivered in a values or beliefs vacuum; that all knowledge is accessed via a process of interpretation.

In any case, as Astley reminds us:

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p. 82.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83.



Christian education does not pass on a ready-made Christian culture, belief-system or lifestyle, for that would be to pass on a second-hand, inherited Christianity that would not necessarily suit the needs of the next generation of Christians.<sup>189</sup>

So the analogy is one of passing on the paint box rather than the painting! But, as Astley points out, successful artists seldom work with paint box alone; both inspiration and technique may be found in viewing others' works of art. There is a mutuality of effect between the tradition which is passed on and those who receive it. St Paul may well have passed on that which had previously been handed down to him,<sup>190</sup> but in the Christian generations since the Resurrection has been subject to many different interpretations. The act of handing on a tradition will often modify that which is handed on, as well as acting as a foundational experience for the one who has received it. The important matter is to recognise the need for balance between

....a set of Christian experiences that begins with our reflections on, and our explorations of, our own experience and viewpoint, and then relates these to an appropriate, selected element in the Christian tradition, so that our understanding of both is enlarged....[and] a set of Christian education experiences that gives a more complete account of the whole range of past Christian tradition, articulated as far as possible from its own point of view....and then applies it to appropriate, selected elements of our experience, to produce again a mutual learning.<sup>191</sup>

Sedgwick speaks of the need for the church school to enable pupils to "dialogue with [the Christian] tradition. It will always allow the views of others to inform its self-understanding, and it will respect the right of a pupil or teacher to adopt a position which is outside that of the community's tradition"<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Astley J (1992). 'Tradition and Experience: Conservative and Liberal Models for Christian Education', in Astley & Day (1992), p. 42.

<sup>190</sup> 1 *Corinthians* 15: 3.

<sup>191</sup> Astley J (1992). 'Tradition and Experience' in Astley & Day (1992) p. 51.

<sup>192</sup> Sedgwick P (1992) in Astley & Day (1992), p. 247.

But the tradition is important, and it is the purpose of the church school to 'socialize' the child into the tradition. For Sedgwick this entails expressing the faith of the church "for those open to its message", and what will be expressed is the need to become "responsible personally for a relationship to God on the one hand and for the society in which we live on the other."<sup>193</sup>

Astley makes the same point in somewhat different language. The mature Christian (and the purpose of nurture is to lead the child to Christian maturity) is "integrally related to the power and possibility of love: of growing up through love into love. This is a difficult thing to hear, because it is hard to hear a soft thing."<sup>194</sup>

But who should be on the receiving end of this Christian education? Levitt, commenting on the so-called 'general' focus of CE schools suggests that

[T]here may be a tension for Anglican schools in maintaining their dual role of providing education as a service for the whole community and teaching, or more recently, educating in the Christian faith.<sup>195</sup>

Hooker and Lamb even have reservations about religious teaching even in a church school:

....it seems to us that in no way can the Christian faith become 'compulsory' in a church school, even if parents appear to sign away their rights to anything else by entering their children in such a school....[yet] the presentation of the Christian faith cannot be merely 'objective' as it may be in a state school.....in a church school Christianity must be more than described, it must be in some sense prescribed.<sup>196</sup>

This brings us, appropriately, to a question which is both fundamental and critical (particularly in terms of the Dearing Report, and especially Chapter 3 of that Report, considered above): is it right for the church school to participate in evangelising mission of the church? As noted in Chapter 2 above, Astley urged that there should be

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* p. 248.

<sup>194</sup> Astley J (1992). 'Growing into Christ', in Astley & Day (1992) p. 319.

<sup>195</sup> Levitt M (1996), p. 50.

<sup>196</sup> Hooker R & Lamb C (1986) p. 102.

....some overt proclamation and invitation must somehow be presented to and heard by the pupils within the school, and perhaps also their parents and families and the community that the school serves. But that 'community' may itself be understood in two ways: as the church community ('the gathered church'?) or as the non-ecclesial neighbourhood.<sup>197</sup>

He therefore distinguished between the approach to mission in a general/service school and in a domestic/nurture school.<sup>198</sup> Astley correctly notes elsewhere that 'Dearing' in fact,

...appears to allow for a role of explicit mission in the rationale and practice of church schools. This would be a controversial position to take.<sup>199</sup>

Indeed it is. I have argued above that it would be difficult to justify 'evangelism on the rates', and Astley has explicitly recognised that difficulty.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, he also wants to argue that "we need not be quite so mealy-mouthed about evangelism", and he sets out to

...explore with more sympathy the appropriateness of the language of evangelism and conversion in church schooling, and even in general schooling.<sup>201</sup>

Firstly, in the church school, if Christian formation is an appropriate activity (as he believes it is) then that can be complemented by evangelism. Christian pupils and staff

....need constantly to be challenged to new and renewed commitment, and to multiple conversions in different dimensions of their Christian life.<sup>202</sup>

Referring to the particular debate concerning the teaching of RE, and the eschewing by most RE professionals of a confessional approach to the subject, Astley offers the important insight that even secular educators are evangelists of a kind. They

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<sup>197</sup> Astley J (2001) 'What is the church's mission to the nation, and what part do church schools play?' *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads*. p. 7.

<sup>198</sup> See pp. 108 – 110 above.

<sup>199</sup> Astley J (2002a). p. 180.

<sup>200</sup> Astley J (2001). p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Astley J (2002a) p. 181.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181.



...engage daily in what we may surely think of as a form of implicit (general) evangelism, through teaching that leads to the adoption of particular attitudes, values and dispositions – and, of course, beliefs. Education is always in the business of changing belief: not only beliefs-that about the natural and human world, but also the ‘beliefs-in’ that express the trust, commitment and engagement that are essential to both academic pursuits and everyday life.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed, if teachers did not alter attitudes and inspire children to consider their values, then they would not be engaged in education, they would simply be imparting impersonal information. Again, it is (fairly) true that

...in most subject-areas, the practice of education is predicated on a prior commitment on the part of teachers and society to the value of the subject and the truth of its conclusions.<sup>204</sup>

Astley also wishes to define evangelism in very broad terms, so that it is not so far distant from education, and well away from the “anti-rational, wholly heteronomous and negatively indoctrinatory”<sup>205</sup> activities of some. So evangelical activity (so defined) in church schools is not simply acceptable, it is proper, and it may be quite explicit and specific. It must have “something to do with Christ”, and there must be

...some patent, definite focus on the tradition of Jesus within the school, as a touchstone for all its forms of Christian education, so as to ensure that it is his concrete life, teaching, character, death and spirit that children are faced by and formed in.<sup>206</sup>

I find myself in agreement with Astley, but only insofar as the church school is a nurture school, and then only the Domestic 1 & 2 models. Although Astley’s definition of evangelism is broad, and

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187. I would wish to place a caveat against the apparent notion of unanimity regarding truth claims.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 191.

...consistent with good education [in that it helps] learners identify and evaluate what they believe, and the grounds and implications of those beliefs, thus developing their ability to think for themselves....<sup>207</sup>

there still remains (inevitably, if 'evangelism' is not simply identical with a liberal education) an intention to engage in some positive Christian formation, which should also be a liberating activity, one by which youngsters can work out their own beliefs and values, but which is fundamentally about nurturing a child within the family of the church. Elsewhere, Astley expresses disappointment at an evangelism which is so implicit, it is almost unrecognisable: it is not just about being good and polite, or even environmentally aware,<sup>208</sup> it should be about Jesus Christ.<sup>209</sup> Indeed,

Churches need children in order to learn how to be themselves, how to be really human and how to be Christian. Church schools can only help in that learning.<sup>210</sup>

But what if the child in the church school is a Muslim; or what if her family is committed to its membership of the British Humanist Association? Does the fact that they are in a church school mean that they should expect to be subject to a programme of Christian formation? Indeed, what if the family is not particularly religious, but might still designate itself 'Christian'? As is demonstrated below, such families will often resent any attempt to 'convert' their children: religion, for them, is often such a private matter, that they themselves have no wish to discuss it with their children: 'let them make up their own minds'. Would Astley find it acceptable for a Muslim voluntary aided school to adopt the same approach to nurture, if it happened (unlikely as that would be) that non-Muslim children attended the school? What if a secular school head teacher decided that she wanted to 'spread the gospel' of secular humanism? Although Astley mentions 'general schooling' at the beginning of this particular

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>208</sup> Astley J (2002b). p. 8.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

article (which, with it complementing the phrase ‘church schooling’, I take to mean the work of the general secular community school), he does not actually deal with those schools separately, but again, I would contend that if “conversion and evangelism” has any Christian content or Christian intentions it would be totally out of place in such schools. However widely evangelism is defined, if it is to retain any element of its original meaning (i.e. preaching the ‘*euangelion*’), its place can only appropriately be in a school which makes it clear that it is committed to Christian nurture; that school would need, by definition, to be a ‘nurture school’.

### Religious Education

What, then, of Religious Education as a discrete area of the curriculum? In the 1944 Education Act, what today are generally known separately as religious education (then, religious instruction i.e. the classroom ‘subject’) and school worship, were seen to be part of the same ‘religious education’.<sup>211</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I shall not be examining issues specifically related to school worship, not only because it is a major subject in its own right,<sup>212</sup> and space precludes even a cursory examination of the issues, but it is a matter where, so far as my own position is concerned, the matter is clear-cut: the worship of God can only properly be an activity of a committed religious community, and therefore has no place in the secular community school.<sup>213</sup> It is noteworthy that during 2002-3 76% of secondary schools broke the law on the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship, and that Her

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<sup>211</sup> 1944 Education Act, S.25.

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Hull JM (1975a) *School Worship: an Obituary*. London, SCM Press. This provides an excellent historical perspective, before concluding that Faith-focused worship (is there any other kind?) in secular schools is simply “uneducational” (p. 103), whilst in church schools the “crux of the situation is...whether school worship is intended to be a way of influencing the uncommitted” (p. 106). These were the days, of course, when the Anglican twin focus, or perhaps even mainly the general/service focus, were more in evidence in the secondary sector than they are today. For Hull the child’s integrity was paramount: church schools had the right to offer Christian nurture, but no right to force it on pupils – and “worship is necessarily a nurturing activity” (p. 110). Evidently, Hull was a little premature with his obituary; but the death of school worship, in the secondary sector at least, has been lingering.

<sup>213</sup> For my arguments, see Shepherd P (1997). ‘Let Us Pray?’.



Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, David Bell, has recently called for the law to be reviewed.<sup>214</sup> School assemblies are an altogether different matter; it is entirely right for the school community to gather together, to celebrate its identity and its achievements, and to share its concerns.

Worship is (obviously?) central for a church school community, although there are important issues which must be considered if that community includes children of Faiths other than Christianity, or of no religious faith at all. For the former, there are those issues relating to the possibility of inter-Faith worship,<sup>215</sup> while for the latter, there is the same general argument against worship in community schools which relates to the child's integrity.<sup>216</sup> Worship would be an essential part of the life of any single-Faith nurture school, for it is a central part of the Christian life.<sup>217</sup>

Under more recent legislation, RE (no longer RI) and worship continue to be dealt with together,<sup>218</sup> and many of the provision of the 1944 Act remain intact (e.g. parents' right to withdraw their children from both RE and school worship); indeed, it is arguable that, via the 1988 Education Reform Act, the legal position for both RE and worship has been strengthened and clarified,<sup>219</sup> and the impact of school inspections have also had their effect (more on RE than worship, it would seem). RE in community schools (and Foundation and Voluntary Controlled schools, with certain other provisions) must currently be taught according to the

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<sup>214</sup> *News.bbc.co.uk* 21/4/04.

<sup>215</sup> Briefly explored in Chapter 8, above.

<sup>216</sup> For consideration of a more positive assessment of the possibilities for school worship, whilst still protecting the integrity of the children, see Watson B (1988) 'Children at School: A Worshipping Community?', in O'Keeffe B (1988), pp. 101 - 124

<sup>217</sup> See Chapter 1, above.

<sup>218</sup> School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Chapter 6.

<sup>219</sup> A useful account of the history of RE from the 1944 Act to the 1988 Act is provided by Parsons G 'There and back again? Religion and the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts', in Parsons G (ed) (1994), pp. 163 - 198.

locally adopted Agreed Syllabus,<sup>220</sup> and all such syllabuses must reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are mainly Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions in the country. Where a voluntary aided school has a religious foundation, RE must be provided in accordance with the school's trust deed or, where provision is not made by a trust deed, in accordance with the Faith which is the schools' foundation. Undergirding all this has been the professional rejection of the notion that RE should be a specifically Christian activity, and (in consequence?) the rise of a new kind of RE.

As Lee notes:

Since 1971 the issue of whether theology or social science is the proper macrotheory has been one of the most recurrent and most hotly debated issues in the field [of RE]. It would appear that the social-science approach is gaining the upper hand over the theological approach, so much so, in fact, that a prominent advocate of the theological approach could lament that all of religious education is now beginning to take its direction from the social sciences.<sup>221</sup>

Nevertheless, whatever the style of approach, in recent years RE has become known as 'the Cinderella of the curriculum',<sup>222</sup> although that is an apt description only up to a point. After all, Cinderella did eventually get to the ball, and she did marry her prince. It is a sad fact that in many schools, RE is more the 'Sleeping Beauty' than anything else. A 1999 report in the *Church Times* claimed that

....more than half the county secondary schools are failing to meet the legal requirement to teach religious education to all pupils [and specifically that] across the country standards in RE are generally lower than in other subjects.<sup>223</sup>

The problem has more recently been summarised by Robert Jackson:

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<sup>220</sup> The DfES has initiated conversations with its religious partners during 2004 regarding the possibility of a national RE syllabus (in line with National Curriculum subjects).

<sup>221</sup> Lee JM (1982). 'Religious education and theology', in Astley J et al (eds.) (1996), p. 45.

<sup>222</sup> Copley T (1997). p. 35.

<sup>223</sup> *Church Times* 23/7/99.

The downside of the current system is that, although RE is the entitlement of every pupil, the subject has been marginalised through not being part of the national curriculum.<sup>224</sup>

But there is no excuse for RE being curtailed or minimised in any school: all children are entitled to be educated religiously simply on the grounds that religion and spirituality (not the same thing, but RE is surely the classic delivery vehicle for education in spirituality?) are intrinsic aspects of our humanity, and to exclude their insights and their experiences is to deal a fatal blow to any chance of a youngster coming to understand what it is - really - to be human.<sup>225</sup> But should church schools fail to deliver excellent RE, then they are not only failing their pupils, they are failing everything that they stand for.

That is not to say that programmes of religious education, even in church schools, ought to be confessional in either intention or approach.<sup>226</sup> A recent study has examined the aim of teachers in RC schools.<sup>227</sup> This showed that there was some considerable agreement in catholic schools with the aims of RE as they might be articulated in secular schools: specifically enabling pupils to understand the influence of religion, to enable them to think critically about religion and to reflect on ultimate questions, and to encourage them to develop positive attitudes towards religion. However, it was not unexpected to find a more confessional thread in the teaching in RC schools operating alongside these non-confessional aims.

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<sup>224</sup> 'More than one faith in the frame'. *TES*. 14/5/04, p. 19

<sup>225</sup> For a recent discussion of the place of RE as a core ingredient of the curriculum see White J (2004) 'Should religious education be a compulsory school subject', who argues that there is no justification for its inclusion, and the response by Wright A 'The justification of compulsory religious education: a response to Professor Wright', both in *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 26.2 (2004), pp. 151 – 164 and 165 – 174, respectively.

<sup>226</sup> For an outline and analysis of the 'confessional', 'phenomenological' and 'experiential' approaches to RE see Chater M (1997). 'Different Approaches to Religious Education', in Kay WK. and Francis LJ (eds), *Religion in Education, Volume 1*, Leominster, Gracewing, *passim*. For a specific critique of the confessional approach see pp. 269 – 271.

<sup>227</sup> Astley J et al. (2000). 'How Different is Religious Education in Catholic Schools?', in *International Journal of Education and Religion*, Vol. 1.2, pp. 267 – 281.



Those who teach in church schools may consider themselves privileged to be working in schools which are soaked in a Christian ethos, and which strive in so many different ways to be Christian communities. Children in church schools – we might say, even in nurture schools - are just as entitled as anyone else to a proper educational experience. But, of course, that experience will be contextualised in an institution which is a part of the church itself, and so which ought to be rich not only in exemplar materials, but also in the experience of living lives of faith. It will also take account of the blurring, noted above, between the concepts of education and Christian education, and the important insights of Thiessen, also outlined above. As Francis made clear, Christian nurture is to be worked out through the whole life of the church school, particularly its worshipping life and its pastoral care. It is to be found in those distinctive features of church schools, ten of which had been identified by Waddington.<sup>228</sup> The role of RE as a nurturing activity in itself should essentially be no different from any other curriculum area. It is the context for the ‘delivery’, not the subject in itself, that is the key. The Christian context in which children who attend church schools are educated should so touch their lives, that they never forget the experience of being in a place where Christian values are taken seriously and where the Christian Gospel is daily proclaimed. That is not the same as advocating confessional RE.

What then, should be made of Cooling’s contention that

...all religious educators are confessional because no one can escape defining religious education in terms of faith-based goals.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Waddington R (1984) p. 76.

<sup>229</sup> Cooling T (1994). ‘Professionalism, confessionalism and religious education: an exploration from the British context’, in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1994). p. 164. For an argument for a return to confessionalism see Thomson P ‘Whose confession? Which tradition?’, (2004). *BJRE*. Vol. 26.1. pp. 61 – 72. “Religious education is, ultimately, about choosing sides.....what is good and what is true.” p. 70.

Despite Cooling arguing that because RE teachers will be dealing with “fundamental questions of purpose and significance, including what it means to be human and the nature of knowledge”,<sup>230</sup> and that because they are using the language of theology, there is an almost implicit confessionalism present, all that seems a logical leap too far. He calls to his support Astley’s “important point that it is impossible to avoid theological criteria in selecting suitable content to include in a religious education programme” as well as the valid claim that the process of education is never value free (a point already made above). But it seems to me that neither of these justify his conclusion that

...educational goals are inescapably confessional, in the sense that they will reflect the presuppositional beliefs of those framing them *and therefore reflect* faith-based goals.<sup>231</sup>

It is evident that any educator will come to his task as someone who possesses beliefs and values, and that those beliefs and values will have some kind of effect on his teaching; to say that is simply to underline the impossibility of providing a ‘neutral’ education. But that is not the same as claiming that there must be, as part of the educational package, a set of confessional aims and “faith-based goals”; at least, not unless the concepts of ‘confessionalism’ and ‘faith’ are being stretched considerably in their meaning. While it is true that theology, as a discipline, will normally be generated from within a community of faith,<sup>232</sup> it is still “part of the whole intellectual enterprise of mankind...”<sup>233</sup> As such it is part of, and not separate from, the rest of human knowledge and speculation. It has particular affinities with philosophy, history, and the social and natural sciences, and that is why Macquarrie asserts the importance of theology not only learning from other disciplines, but also

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<sup>230</sup> Cooling T (1994). p. 159.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* p. 160. My italics.

<sup>232</sup> Macquarrie J (1977), p. 2. “Theology...will always speak from a specific faith...[this] implies participation in a community”.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

“sharpening and defining its own point of view in relation to theirs.”<sup>234</sup> It would seem that unless, *a priori*, theology is thought to be of a different category from other human intellectual endeavours (and it may be that Cooling, from an Evangelical perspective, believes that to be the case), then the beliefs and values that religious educators bring to their task will have no greater effect on their teaching than the beliefs and values which a scientific educator will inevitably bring to hers. However, neither will they necessarily be engaging in ‘confessional’ or ‘faith-based’ goals. Clearly, a confessional, faith-based goal will be to bring others to share the same confession and faith. The distinction made between confessional and non-confessional RE is used precisely to make the point that it is never the task of the true educator to teach for the express purpose of bringing about the specific end of having the child accept their faith, as opposed to any other, or none. Indeed, it may be argued that if, following a well-delivered course in religious education, the young adult, having considered all the issues, decides that the religious life is not for him, then that RE course has been successful. It is the alternative scenario, whereby the person never gives religion a further thought, that spells failure for the RE teacher.

This discussion enables us to revisit the concept of commitment in RE. How problematic will the commitment of the teacher, or the pupil, be? Probably no more problematic than for any other subject.

All school subjects involve commitments. The history teacher will not make much progress unless his classes have an initial commitment to the study of history, and he hopes by his lessons to reinforce and extend that commitment.....Religious education is even more deeply concerned with this, since it is a study of how men and women have accepted deep commitments to what they conceive to be the truth about experience and of how they feel the truth has some claim upon their loyalty and their actions.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33

<sup>235</sup> Cox E (1983). p. 49.



Nevertheless, such commitments can cause “peculiar problems”. How are truth claims dealt with? How are commitments arrived at? Cox reflects on studies carried out during the 1970s by Paffard and Robinson into transcendental experiences, particularly among young people. Such experiences are not only very personal, they are not easy to communicate, and yet they may be life-changing. Yet one person’s authentic experience, may be another’s delusion. One person’s commitment may lead to fanaticism (about which Thiessen warned), whilst another’s may lead to a mature tolerance. Whatever the kinds of commitment (“the hard, the soft, and the sceptical”),<sup>236</sup> they must be taken into account when developing an RE strategy. However, Cox is sure that, in educational terms,

...the obligations of a teacher of religious education are no different from those of his colleagues.<sup>237</sup>

With that principle in mind, Cox nevertheless presents an argument for the teacher of RE to be herself religious. Some years ago that might have been assumed; it cannot be assumed today. But can, for example, a committed atheist ever be a successful teacher of RE? Perhaps no more than a music teacher who has never played an instrument, never listens to music or goes to concerts; or the PE teacher who has never engaged in sport. The modern languages teacher who has learnt all his French from a book, and has never visited France (and, more to the point, never intends doing so), will be lacking in the important cultural aspects of his chosen subject. Nevertheless, if lack of commitment is a problem, then so still is the possession of one:

On the one hand [the RE teacher] has to be acquainted with a religion, and know the meaning of faith and the feeling of belonging to a religious body; on the other hand he has to teach with an openness which too firm an attachment to religion can make

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* p. 51.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

difficult. Because of this the religious education teacher is exposed to the possibility of tension between his religious and his educational commitments.<sup>238</sup>

There is a further problem with which Cox does not deal directly. The Christian RE teacher also has to tread carefully when she is dealing with other Faiths. This will prove particularly problematic when the teacher's own theological views are of the more 'exclusive' kind. Nevertheless, there is a professional imperative to teach fairly and honestly, and the teacher owes it to her discipline to ensure that any comparative studies in religion do not turn into arguments for the superiority of Christianity. Perhaps, as one wag apocryphally put it: it is better for comparative religion to be taught by the comparatively religious! In fact, Cox explores the arguments for the teacher adopting some kind of agnosticism, although he still concludes that

...a confident belief can be more tolerant and objective than a half-faith, a doubted and fearing faith, which has to protect itself by refusing to contemplate the possibility of error or of alternative truth, and which has to be rigidly advocated and oversold, to allay the unadmitted doubts of the teacher as much as convince the pupil.<sup>239</sup>

Clearly a church school would want, at the very least, to commend the religious approach to life in general, and the Christian Faith in particular, although active proselytisation in the Faith would militate against the principle of education which implies a 'liberal' process by which pupils are encouraged to think for themselves. But as Astley notes:

[A]lthough becoming educated in religion involves learning to think for oneself in religious terms, this does not mean that such a person 'will necessarily go on to do so with any degree of conviction or commitment'.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>240</sup> Astley J (1996). 'Theology for the Untheological?: theology, philosophy and the classroom', in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1996), p. 65. Astley quotes Donald Hudson.

Writing in the *Church Times*<sup>241</sup> the General Secretary of the Board of Education, having referred, quite correctly, to my own conviction that RE, even in our church schools, should be “educational and non-confessional” drew the erroneous conclusion that “effectively, this suggested that education and Christian nurture were mutually incompatible”. That is to miss the point entirely. Every child is entitled to receive a good religious education: to be taught the knowledge, skills and concepts associated with religion, and to be encouraged to adopt positive attitudes towards religion and spirituality. It does mean that the church school will promote such positive attitudes (whereas a secular school might not), and will do so in a way that safeguards the integrity of each child. But just because they attend a church school does not make them ‘pew fodder’, although this seems to be precisely what ‘Dearing’ (and Hall) had in mind.<sup>242</sup> The RE teacher who uses his position in the classroom to evangelise (in the classic sense of that term) betrays his calling as a teacher. Attfield refers to his attendance at a Conference organised by the British Council of Churches where he found himself “in a minority of one....in disapproving of child evangelism and insisting that any Christian approach to children must be education.”<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, as Thatcher notes:

RE should aim, not at securing religious commitment, but at making religious commitment possible.<sup>244</sup>

That is an entirely valid aim, just as the teacher of PE hopes to instil into his pupils a lifelong commitment to healthy exercise and team activities, the Christian RE teacher will undoubtedly

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<sup>241</sup> ‘Teaching RE because it is the truth’, *Church Times* 16/6/00.

<sup>242</sup> Astley suggests that ‘Dearing’ had a very limited view of evangelism: “....a form of nurture that does not seek to convert children to Christianity, but which gives the opportunity for informed choice”. Astley J (2002b). p. 7. Although those kinds of sentiment are used in ‘Dearing’, particularly in its distinction between evangelism and proselytism, the overall thrust of the Report belies that language (that is part of its incoherence). Para. 3.3 of ‘Dearing’ states: “The Church has a major problem in attracting young people to its services as a means of discharging its mission, and one that causes much concern.” It would be disingenuous to claim that the main aim of the Report was not to argue that church schools should now do what the church itself has failed to do – bring children and their families into church.

<sup>243</sup> Attfield DG (1993) p. 39.

<sup>244</sup> Thatcher A (1987). ‘The recovery of Christian education’ in Francis LJ and Thatcher A (eds) (1990). p. 280. Thatcher is, however, quite critical of the phenomenological approach which, he claims, is part of modern relativism and “climate of unbelief”. *Ibid.* p. 275



be delighted if a pupil decides to become an active member of the 'Christian team', although she should not be terribly disappointed if the pupil decides to 'sign up' for another 'side'! It is playing the game that counts.

Hall, above, has also ignored one of the most basic problems about religious education: is it education into truth, or into meaning? One of the central tenets of the various movements within linguistic philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is that investigation of truth claims must follow, not precede, investigation into meaningfulness. If an assertion is meaningless, it can be neither true nor false; conversely, meaningfulness is no guarantee of truth. Neither, of course should the educational enterprise stop at the elucidation of meaning; it must also seek to pursue the truth, and

...the unity of truth is finally achieved only at the end, and all prior self-appropriations through the establishment of meanings look forward to that; it 'completes' them, as they 'anticipate' it.....Dangerous things happen when the all-embracing meaning or the unity of truth are objectified as properties of, rather than seen as emergent and present in, meaning-giving and self-appropriation.<sup>245</sup>

The process of education is properly that by which young people are enabled to take their own decisions about both meaning and truth, and to make their own commitments. The basic principle must be this: every child is as entitled to an education in religion, as she is entitled to an education in science or history. Religion, whether any individual perceives themselves as religious or not, is an essential aspect of human life, and has been (in some shape or form) since human beings have been around. Any education which lacks religious education will be limited and partial.

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<sup>245</sup> Hardy DW 'Religious Education – Truth-claims or Meaning-giving?', in Felderhof MC (1985), pp. 108, 109.

As a teacher of RE I have argued for many years that the most productive way of teaching RE is to teach about 'religion' rather than teach about 'religions'. The aim of the RE teacher should be to contribute to the development of a religiously educated person (in exactly the same way that a Maths teacher contributes towards the development of a mathematically educated person). A religiously educated person will certainly be one who has knowledge of religions, although she probably will not be a walking encyclopaedia of World Religions. What is much more important is for such a person to be able to apply the knowledge they have, and know how to develop that knowledge base further; to develop the general skills associated with the 'Humanities' and the particular skills needed to deal with religious issues (for example, an understanding of how religious language 'works'); to be secure in their understanding of specifically religious concepts (such as God, sin, karma etc.); and to have developed positive attitudes towards humankind's religious quests.

It makes sense that the content to be used in the teaching of RE (the 'facts' of religion) should be chosen on the basis of relevance (children should have a significant input from their own religious tradition), appropriateness (e.g. which material best helps children understand the nature of prayer) and interest (which material is going to engage the child's enthusiasm). This is particularly important for children who would not claim ownership of any particular religious tradition. As Rudge notes, some pupils "see RE as a stand-off, or at best a conversation, between Faiths, in which they are willing or unwilling observers."<sup>246</sup> But even those children who do have some grounding in a Faith will sometimes find themselves engaging in a simplistic attempt at comparative religion, whereby they make negative judgements about other traditions just because they seem strange to their own experience. This is possibly a greater danger in church schools than in their secular counterparts, where the RE

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<sup>246</sup> Rudge J (1998) p. 158.

teacher needs to work hard to prevent children reinforcing their own prejudices, simply because although they know what they believe, they do not often know why they believe it.

Doble enters a plea for avoiding using beliefs as an entry point for the exploration of Christianity. Not only does this approach tend inevitably towards abstract concepts, but (he argues) belief is often one of the last things to 'come on line' in a religious life: indeed, people tend to belong before they believe (the other side of the 'Davie coin'): "Belonging tends to shape believing and doxology dominates theology".<sup>247</sup> The essence of religious faith is worshipping as a member of the community of Christ; beliefs follow when the experience of being a part of the Body of Christ is reflected on; the purpose of creeds is to define boundaries: "Christians have first responded to God in worship and theologians have then systematised and clarified the beliefs implied within communal devotion."<sup>248</sup> The religious educator should, therefore, help children understand how people come to hold their beliefs, rather than have their lessons dominated by what those beliefs might be.

There is no necessary reason for the RE syllabus in church schools to be different from the locally agreed syllabus, although for reasons of relevance, it is likely that a (more?) significant amount of Christian 'content' will be used. Good RE is good RE wherever it is taught. In fact, in the discussion of Christian nurture and indoctrination considered above, Thiessen argues explicitly for "a phenomenological approach" to RE,<sup>249</sup> as does Bent Smidt Hansen from a Danish perspective, who sees this approach (which, in combination with the 'experiential approach', begins where pupils are, rather than with abstract religious concepts or 'foreign' tales) as enabling pupils to "learn about themselves, at the same time as they are taught how

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<sup>247</sup> Doble P (1993) p. 23.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26

<sup>249</sup> Astley & Day (1992) p. 83.



other people react to the riddles of existence, and how this is one way to trace the long search of mankind.”<sup>250</sup> This is a welcome reminder that phenomenology does not require a scientific objectivity.<sup>251</sup> In any case pure neutrality in the classroom is as impossible as it is undesirable. That is why the experiential approach grew out of the phenomenological approach as both a development and a corrective of it. Astley notes Grimmitt’s view that

...one of the deficiencies of a purely ‘descriptive and non-evaluative’ phenomenological study [is] that it is incompatible with the ‘critical and evaluative nature of educational enquiry’. For pupils to gain personally from the study...education must enable them to relate what they learn about religious traditions to their own experience and to become aware of the ways in which their own perceptions of what they are studying influence their understanding.<sup>252</sup>

It is important, therefore, that as well as learning about religion; pupils’ engagement with Faith traditions enables them to learn more about themselves. Currently, this is an important issue, because RE today is in great danger of becoming ‘bogged down’ in a morass of allegedly neutral ‘facts’ about religions, rather than using religious themes to help children understand what it is to be a religious person, and therefore what it might be for them to adopt a religious stance. So, for example, primary school children are often expected to study up to six different religions (regardless of the religious complexion of their geographical area: do English children really need to spend as much time on Buddhism - or in certain areas, Sikhism or Judaism - as they spend on Christianity and Islam?), with the presumed aim of learning about them, and teachers are finding their pupils, and themselves, overwhelmed with information, which out of the context of a living faith can be irrelevant and off-putting.

This is not simply a problem about the amount of information, but also about the inevitable trivialisation of complex beliefs and practices. This is because, through the process by which

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<sup>250</sup> Hansen BS (1983), p. 16; see also Leech AJH (1989).

<sup>251</sup> Chater M (1997), pp. 277 – 278.

<sup>252</sup> Astley J (1996), in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1996), p. 62.

Agreed Syllabuses are drawn up, an emphasis is placed on the different Faiths being able to ensure that what they feel ought to be taught about their Faith is included. The aim itself is actually quite reasonable; it is important for individual Faith communities to be able to contribute to what is going to be taught about their Faith;<sup>253</sup> it is right that they can use their own knowledge of their Faith to point to what they see as most important in it; and clearly it is better for that guidance to be given by someone who belongs to a particular Faith, than by someone who does not. As a result, however, although members of the Faiths are content because what they consider to be important is being taught in schools, even pupils who participate in the life of their Faith are being swamped with information that they find hard to digest (because the various groups which comprise the SACRE<sup>254</sup> do not want anything important omitted), and the outcome is muddle, confusion, and loss of interest.

If, however, the teacher of RE focused on teaching about religion, and what it means to be a religious person, then the experiences of all pupils, whatever they are, could be engaged; and all would benefit from those diverse experiences. As Rudge puts it: "RE has to move further towards pedagogies of mutual learning and exchange",<sup>255</sup> because without the proper emphasis on proper engagement with the material, the result is often the overload described above. So after

....a decade of debate and subsequent action focusing on the needs of important and potentially vulnerable minorities, and an agenda dominated by the faith communities, the emphasis of RE has been shifted from an exploration of beliefs and values and how religion contributes to human development, to a systematised study of religions. While this may have bolstered the educational involvement of a larger number of faith communities in education, and contributed nationally and locally to interfaith dialogue,

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<sup>253</sup> Nipkow KE (1996). 'Pluralism, Theology and Education: a German perspective', in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1996), p. 46.

<sup>254</sup> Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education; it is the Conference rather than the Council which formally provides the Agreed syllabus; see article by Peter Street in Sutcliffe J (ed) (1984), p. 331. It is now mandatory for each LEA to have a SACRE.

<sup>255</sup> Rudge L (1998). p. 163.



the shift has also diminished the subject, and damaged its chances of contributing to the wider aims of education.<sup>256</sup>

But what, asks Rudge, of those children who see themselves as “nothing”? Those children will be part of what she calls the “silent majority” (the concept borrowed from Wolffe),<sup>257</sup> who may (or presumably may not) be part of those variously defined as having a general, folk, implicit, civil, common, or invisible religion;<sup>258</sup> people who “are not regular participants in public worship”.<sup>259</sup> These people are not “members of the ‘clubs’ represented by the six world Faiths regularly appearing in Agreed Syllabuses, neither are they a part of a New (ancient) Religious Movement like Paganism, and they are not entirely secularist”.<sup>260</sup> But nevertheless, the diet they are being fed is the traditional one - learn about the World Religions (not about what it is like to be religious), and so their beliefs and values have been sidelined.<sup>261</sup>

Astley argues on behalf of such ‘religious outsiders’ that

...we ought to take people’s own religious beliefs more seriously than we do, even (especially?) in schools....Everyone has a theology who articulates into a set of beliefs her human faith; her centres of value, images of power and master stories in which she finds meaning for her life. Everyone has a theology who speaks of her ultimate commitments, her own gods.<sup>262</sup>

Astley is right up to a point (a useful subheading contextualises his remarks as ‘Folk Faith’), but does anything go? What if those gods are no gods at all (in which case, in Christian

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<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* p. 156.

<sup>257</sup> Wolffe J (1993), *passim*.

<sup>258</sup> Not simply synonymous. Wolffe, for example, separates civil religion (religion in public life) from common religion (activities and beliefs relating to the supernatural), and that from invisible and surrogate religion (“broadly religious” in content or style of activity). *Ibid.* p. 310. Wolffe further subdivides common religion into four categories: (i) supernatural elements in folk tradition, including ‘subterranean theologies’, (ii) more generally diffused elements of superstition and supernatural conviction, (iii) specific beliefs such as astrology and ghosts, (iv) direct religious experience. *Ibid.* p. 328.

<sup>259</sup> Rudge J (1998). p. 159. Wolffe designates any kind of involvement with the church ‘conventional religion’, although this may include people with a “minimal degree of identification with Christianity”, such as those who claim to be a member of the CE when asked to fill in a form. *Op cit.* p. 311.

<sup>260</sup> Rudge J (1998). p. 160.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.* p. 162.

<sup>262</sup> Astley J (1996), in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1996), p. 70.



theological terms they would be idols)? What if the story is narrow, introspective and/or destructive? This is not simply a distinction between abstract and concrete thinkers, as important as that is, although Astley is right to note that “even the limited ability of young children to think abstractly...need not keep them away from doing theology”.<sup>263</sup> Rather it is to distinguish between what truly meets the definition of ‘religion’, and what does not, and also to recognise with Macquarrie that religions are open to “imbalance and perversion”, as well as to superficiality and sentimentality.<sup>264</sup> That is why, when Astley states that

Wright correctly observes that all pupils come to RE with some sort of religious belief, whether highly developed and significant or a ‘hotchpotch of confused and contradictory ideas’, whether affirming of religion or ‘a belief in the falsity or meaningless irrelevance of religion’ [and so] RE must help them to reflect on and understand their own beliefs....<sup>265</sup>

my own feeling is that the argument has been taken too far. Leaving aside the question as to whether a thoroughgoing atheism can be properly called a religious belief, even a folk religious belief (although it is entirely right that children who have been brought up in an explicitly atheistic home are enabled to reflect on their beliefs),<sup>266</sup> it cannot be the case, particularly in this post-modern, post-Christian society, that everyone has a theology on which the RE teacher can build. Increasingly, as Brown has pointed out so clearly,<sup>267</sup> a Christian/religious discourse has all but vanished from modern British society. Schools are dealing increasingly with a degree of religious illiteracy which is not just a simple ‘folk faith’, but is a reflection of that loss. More and more people are living without religion impinging on

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<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>264</sup> Macquarrie J (1977), p. 171. Furthermore, while accepting that ‘religion’ cannot be easily defined, Macquarrie argues a compelling case for it having certain essential characteristics, which are not all-embracing. *Ibid.* pp. 149ff.

<sup>265</sup> *Op cit.* p. 71

<sup>266</sup> A family in Lancashire has argued that because they are atheists, their nearest school – a church school which serves the local community – is unsuitable for their child, and that therefore the LEA ought to pay travelling expenses to the nearest secular school, just as it pays expenses to families attending church schools some distance from their homes. *Church Times*. 8/4/04. p. 7.

<sup>267</sup> Brown CG (2001), *passim*.

their personal lives in any significant way at all. Of course, there is another side to that particular coin. We are also living in an age where religion has become yet another commodity, where, as Gill has noted:

If in more traditional societies 'heretics' – that is, the ones who 'chose' – were regarded as deviants, in modern societies heresy becomes the dominant position.....Specifically, within religious education there seem to be competing demands from, on the one hand, an assertive secular humanism, and, on the other, a recognition of plural religious and ideological traditions.<sup>268</sup>

It is therefore essential that RE be a properly critical process: for children to be given the tools to make serious and valid judgements about religion, in so far as their ability allows them to do so. In this sense both the Christian and the secular educationalist will be following a parallel course, for both will be "committed to enquiry, both are concerned with learning in order to make yet further learning possible."<sup>269</sup>

Such critical judgements will not simply be judgements about 'matters of fact' (the dating of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, for instance), but they will also be judgements which arise from the personal and existential concerns of the pupil engaged on her quest (is there a God? Does life have meaning?). Religious and other ideological claims will also be scrutinised and put to the test. None of that should pose a problem for a Christian teacher of RE, in a church school, or in a community school, for that teacher "ought not to feel uneasy in adopting the methodologies of writers such as Smart and Grimmer, if....those methodologies recommend and implement the critical examination of ideologies."<sup>270</sup> In other words, the phenomenological approach, as valuable as it is, must not be content-laden and narrowly descriptive (just: 'What are the five pillars of Islam?'), and there is always that danger, particularly when RE is in the hands (as it

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<sup>268</sup> Gill R (1996). 'Sociology, Theology, and Religious Education', in Astley J and Francis LJ (eds) (1996), pp. 98, 100.

<sup>269</sup> Hull JM (1981). 'Christian nurture and critical openness', in Francis LJ and Thatcher A (eds) (1990). p. 316.

<sup>270</sup> Capaldi GI (1983). 'Christian faith and religious education: a perspective from the theology of liberation', in Francis LJ and Thatcher A (eds) (1990), p. 71.

often is) of untrained teachers. It is always easier to fall back on 'the facts of religion'. Critical thinking, and consequently a critical religious education

....require both the establishment of an appropriate distance from the object of scrutiny in order to create the space in which to establish thoughtful and reflective responses and an engagement with the subject matter under investigation close enough to enable its potential value, truth and authority to be properly experienced.<sup>271</sup>

Wright, therefore, defends "three complementary theses: [that] the search for knowledge requires a rigorous academic study of religion; [that] the search for wisdom demands the personal engagement of the learner in such academic study; [that] the search for truth constitutes the key driver that draws knowledge and wisdom into a unity".<sup>272</sup> What might be termed 'learning about' and 'learning from' are not merely complementary processes, they arise from a "concern for 'critical passion'" and are "twin outcomes of a single process: the cultivation of religious literacy".<sup>273</sup> Westerhoff argues for a "searching faith" from the perspective of Christian nurture. This has three aspects: the period of doubt and critical judgement, within which there is the transfer from a community faith towards an individually owned faith; then comes a period of experimentation, when alternatives may be explored; finally comes commitment when

....they need to be encouraged to remain within the faith community during their intellectual struggle, experimentation, and first endeavour at commitment.<sup>274</sup>

This then expands into an "owned faith", which is nothing less than conversion: "a major change in a person's thinking, feeling and willing".<sup>275</sup> Westerhoff makes the point elsewhere:

Our responsibility is not to offer our children information, advice or guidance. But children do deserve a response to their questions, an affirmation of their quest. We need

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<sup>271</sup> Wright A (2003b), p. 280.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* p. 279.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.* p. 288.

<sup>274</sup> Westerhoff J (1976). p. 97.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.



to help them come into touch with the struggles, pains, doubts, and insecurities their questions reveal.<sup>276</sup>

Particularly in view of this, some might actually consider RE to be a subversive and risky subject. They would be correct. It is dealing with those aspects of human life which are particularly controversial and fundamental (as are aspects of Personal, Social and Health Education). Any good programme of RE will inevitably 'tread on holy ground' and will implicitly engage pupils in a dialogue: a dialogue with themselves ('what do I believe, and why?'), a dialogue with other pupils and with the teacher, and to a certain extent at least, they will become involved in the dialogue between Faiths, as they become more and more aware of opposing truth claims (this is not an argument for a 'supermarket' approach to RE: 'these are the Faiths, choose one'; because for most people, if they are to have a religious faith at all, it will inevitably be one that is a geographical and cultural given). But this is not a matter for regret: it is actually the stuff of true education:

....true dialogue is a deeply educational procedure. It is also a thoroughly risky, because transformative, activity.<sup>277</sup>

In other words, RE has the potential to change personal lives, perhaps rather more than (say) Maths or Technology. As Astley notes, there may even be the possibility of conversion as a result. In studying the views and experiences of others, we become convinced that there is a truth there that now makes sense for us: "The hermeneutical conversation demands that we put our own horizon at risk."<sup>278</sup> But how great is that risk? Religions are essentially systems of salvation.<sup>279</sup> Is it stretching the notion of education too far to include the possibility of 'gaining salvation', as well as knowledge, understanding and the like? If education is truly as I have

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<sup>276</sup> Westerhof J (1980) p. 49.

<sup>277</sup> Astley J (2000). 'Plurality, Dialogue and Religious Education', *IJER*. p. 202.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* p. 202.

<sup>279</sup> Hick J (1989). pp. 32 – 33.

attempted to define it: the process by which young people are led out into a mature, autonomous selfhood, then a soteriological outcome is not untoward: certainly, from a religious perspective it is an essential part of life. Of course, there is an equal risk that pupils may end up less rather than more secure in their faith. Nevertheless, “a salvific dialogue should be available at some point close to the heart of all religious education”,<sup>280</sup> and, Astley claims,

[I]t is arguable that religious schools may be able to encourage this dialogue more effectively than other educational institutions, because their religious context makes a salvific dialogue more natural. Dialogical exploration is perhaps also better mounted from a relatively safe haven where a distinct set of beliefs and values has been tried in the fires of community experience, and where people have already realised some solidarity and community, despite their disagreements.<sup>281</sup>

But could that kind of school community be anything other than that found in the nurture model?

### **A Christian approach to the Curriculum**

What of the general curriculum; is there a distinctively Christian approach? We noted in Chapter 3 above the words of Archbishop William Temple:

Education is only adequate and worthy when it itself is religious.<sup>282</sup>

Speaking to the same organisation nearly half a century later, another Archbishop of Canterbury summed up a specifically Christian approach to education in these words:

Manifesting concern for every individual, for the whole person, demonstrating forgiveness and acceptance and building up a caring community in the school.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Astley J (2000). p. 204.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>282</sup> Address to the National Society.

<sup>283</sup> Runcie R (1982).

Astley and Day suggest that the Christian input to the curriculum “will be in those areas that are characteristically, rather than distinctively, Christian.”<sup>284</sup> ‘Characteristically’ rather than ‘distinctively’ sums up Runcie’s words well, because concern for the individual, forgiveness, acceptance, and so on, are values not restricted to Christian people. Indeed, one would hope that the ‘Christian’ characteristics mentioned by Runcie would be found in any good school. Of course, some might want to argue that this is because British society is ‘based’ on Christian values. Shepherd<sup>285</sup> provides examples of how Christian values could be delivered through a ‘secular’ curriculum, although in doing so he argues that there is, at least today, an important distinction to be made between specifically Christian values and ‘common ‘ values, if such can be thought to exist:

In a society that is both secular and multi-faith, efforts to determine a common core of ‘foundation’ values, without having a common context in which to do so, are most likely to lead to a blandness – a truly low common denominator that is next to useless because, in seeking not to offend anyone, it helps no-one at all.<sup>286</sup>

Astley and Day designate their approach as “implicitly Christian education”, although it “will not necessarily differ in content or method, but only in motivation, from other species of education that lead to personal growth.”<sup>287</sup> Christian education is, therefore, mainly different in intent. In fact, claims Sedgwick, “there can be no future whatsoever for a Christian account of history, or the novel, let alone evolution in science.”<sup>288</sup> So there is no particular ‘Christian way’ of teaching any particular subject; rather there is what Sedgwick terms “an overall unity of truth”. Describing the church school as an “intermediate community which nurtures people into faith”, Sedgwick argues that what the school is actually doing is

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<sup>284</sup> Astley & Day (1992) p. 16.

<sup>285</sup> Shepherd P (1998), pp. 15 – 38.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>287</sup> *Op cit.* p. 16.

<sup>288</sup> Sedgwick P in Astley & Day (1992), p. 247.



....not witnessing to the view that God is quite separate from the world but that certain books, rituals or institutions witness to God's transcendent reality in the world, and that without that witness God's transcendence will not be known. Therefore the church school will be a witness to a world both secular and yet totally known by God, who is at work amongst it.....At the same time there will be an exploration of what it means to create social relationships according to criteria which reflect the divine/human interaction.....<sup>289</sup>

This notion of intermediacy is important, because in a very important sense the CE school is not simply identical with the church (in contrast with the traditional Catholic model: "another form of church", cited by Grace<sup>290</sup>); it is both an aspect of the church at work in the particular field of education, and it is a partner with the church (and with the Christian family) in its nurturing role.

However, one of the undergirding arguments of this thesis has been that the rationale for faith schools is built on the reality that schools do not 'deliver' education from a neutral values/beliefs base, and that, therefore, Christian or Muslim parents (for example) are likely to prefer their children to be educated in a values/beliefs context that reflects the home, rather than one that does not.<sup>291</sup> If that claim is true, then it might seem that 'intent' is not a sufficient way of differentiating a Christian (or Muslim) education, from any other education. There needs to be something more. Indeed, it has also been my argument that the differentiation between a religious and a secular educational context is not sufficient either; that it is not simply the case that Christian or Muslim parents would prefer a religious as opposed to secular educational context, but that Christian parents would prefer a Christian school, and Muslim parents would prefer a Muslim school:

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>290</sup> Grace G (2002a), p. 8.

<sup>291</sup> Shepherd P (2003). 'Admissions Theory and Practice', *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads*, Issue 11, Feb. 2003. p. 20

.....parents from the Muslim community in particular may well be nervous of too overt a Christian emphasis, and also critical that modern values still find too congenial a home in the church school.<sup>292</sup>

Evidently, there are also many Catholic parents who would prefer a Catholic over a 'Christian' school.

The implication is clear: such parents would seem to expect that the school of their choice would have something significantly distinctive (perhaps even different) to offer, which other schools do not. Waddington wrote<sup>293</sup> of the church school needing to build "Christian inferences [into] the ethos and teaching [of the school] as signals for children to detect". Church schools were also to be, in curricular terms, places "where you can see the wood for the trees" i.e. where there was an integrated view of knowledge. This was one of the first examples of thinking about the question of whether church schools had something distinctive to offer apart from RE and Worship; he was affirming that there were ways in which the Christian dimension could shine through the curriculum without distorting the educational entitlement of pupils (it has to be remembered that most CE schools are primary schools, and that most primary school pupils are admitted simply on the basis of proximity to the school). Nevertheless, there would be something distinctive (and not simply characteristic) about the approach to the curriculum.

One of the great debts owed by those involved in church schools to the National Society, particularly since 1989 (when Officers, in particular, were able to take breath following several years of demanding education legislation to scrutinise), is due to its publication programme. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a vast increase in the number of books

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<sup>292</sup> Hooker R & Lamb C (1986) p. 100.

<sup>293</sup> Waddington R (1984). p. 71.

and booklets (and latterly a website) addressing the needs and interests of church schools. One of the earliest of these publications was a specifically Christian view of the school curriculum (the National Curriculum had been introduced in 1988, and in some ways this document was an indication that there were still many misgivings about that particular development).<sup>294</sup> The booklet itself was the outcome of discussions by a Curriculum Advisory Group (of which I was a member) established by the Schools Committee of the (then) General Synod Board of Education. The group reflected on some “common educational values” (those values which should be shared by all teachers in all schools): “Integrity and Commitment....Relationships...Control and Discipline....Choice of Content....The Wholeness of the Curriculum....[and] Developing All Pupils to their Fullest Potential”.<sup>295</sup> Claiming that Jesus’ life was itself “the epitome of an educational self-discovery, self-understanding and the search for Truth”,<sup>296</sup> the group argued that education was an essential tool in enabling people “to understand and to interpret the whole revelation of God in Christ...” The common values of education, therefore, were seen to be capable of having a distinctively Christian aim, and also, in certain respects, a distinctive content; and although this was not made explicit, it seemed to be implied that this was the difference between the delivery of the (same) curriculum in a church school and a community school. Not only was Christianity not inimical to education, but education itself might be Christian. The “Christian inheritance” could be handed on “in such a way as to enable pupils to make a free and informed commitment or freely withhold that commitment”.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Brown AS and Lankshear DW (1990).

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9 – 12.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.



Other titles in the National Society series specifically aimed at church schools included many useful and practical topics: *School Worship*,<sup>298</sup> *Religious Education*,<sup>299</sup> *Opening Their Eyes*,<sup>300</sup> *Sex Education*,<sup>301</sup> and the 'SMSC' quartet: *Moral Education*,<sup>302</sup> *Spiritual Development*,<sup>303</sup> *Cultural Development*,<sup>304</sup> and *Social Development*.<sup>305</sup> These booklets sold well, and were much appreciated by Heads and teachers in church schools, both primary and secondary. Many schools were inspired to produce their own 'Christianised' versions of common documents. The following is an example of how a policy which would be found in all schools may be provided with an explicit Christian 'spin':

Canon Slade School, as a Church of England school, places great emphasis on its responsibility to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of each pupil. The school's attitude towards this work is informed by a robust Christian Doctrine of Creation. The belief that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God implies that humanity has the potentiality to become 'adopted' as children of God, and so of somehow participating in the very life of God himself. This means that as human beings we can be creative as well as creaturely, and that we have been given a share with God in shaping that still unfinished creation in which our lives are set. However, we are often tempted to move from being guardians and stewards to being exploiters; from being users to being abusers. We forget that we are creatures and must have respect for nature's laws. In other words, all we do in Christian education must be geared to enable pupils to choose the good and not the evil; to use not abuse God's creation, and in particular their own bodies and their own selves.<sup>306</sup>

This, of course, is simply one example, but it shows that an explicitly Christian approach to the curriculum in a church school is not only possible, it is also essential. The problem with the hidden curriculum is that it is sometime so well hidden, it is difficult to find. If distinctiveness is going to run through the church school like wording through a stick of rock, then every aspect of the life of the school needs to be 'infected' by the Christian ethos. The

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<sup>298</sup> National Society (1989a).

<sup>299</sup> National Society (1989b).

<sup>300</sup> Musty E (1991): the booklet was about Worship and RE with Children with Special Educational Needs.

<sup>301</sup> Brown AS (1992b).

<sup>302</sup> Brown AS and Ainsworth J (1995).

<sup>303</sup> Brown AS and Furlong J (1995).

<sup>304</sup> Bailey J (1997).

<sup>305</sup> Day P (1997).

<sup>306</sup> The Governors of Canon Slade School, Drugs Policy, revised March 2004.

curriculum, being the core business of the school, cannot be excluded. We have seen above, how this can be effected without compromising the education integrity of the enterprise. Arguably, church schools still have to take the need to be explicit about what they are much more seriously, and curriculum managers will need to approach their work recognising that whatever the work they are doing in science, English or history, they are already doing in some kind of values/beliefs context; all they need to do is to ensure that context is in keeping with the Christian ethos of the school. They cannot be allowed to assume that all that needs to be done is being done by the RE Department.

### **An Ecclesiology for CE secondary schools**

The argument of this thesis has been that an Anglican ecclesiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must recognise that the Church of England is no longer, in any meaningful sense, the church for the nation, and that there is no longer (for historical and political, let alone ecclesiological reasons) any rationale for the church to be providing schools for anyone other than its practising members, although the need for an ecumenical dimension has been argued throughout. Equally, it has been pointed out that what has sometimes been termed, usually pejoratively, the 'gathered church' model is no descent into sectarianism. Rather it represents a recovery from nominalism, and seeks to encourage a more genuine commitment among those who would call themselves Anglican. This argument locates the Church of England as one denominational group within the Christian Church alongside others. From this perspective (although not necessarily from the perspective of the churches themselves, particularly the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which would reject the denominational label) all 'branches' of the worldwide Christian Church within England (presumably excepting those which would more meaningfully be designated 'sect') are Christian denominations, equal, in that designation, with each other. Indeed, this notion of equality is central to the

whole concept of denomination which, it will be recalled, is characterised by non-inclusivity (membership is not assumed, although you can still reckon yourself born an Anglican or Methodist) with membership open to any who choose to join. On the whole denominations are fairly tolerant of other denominations, and of differences in belief. Denominationalism is relatively undemanding and there are no great tests to 'pass' before one is admitted, neither does it claim exclusive access to a salvific truth. This is the main reason why, from its point of view, the Roman Catholic Church, (which, for example, continues to deny the validity of Anglican Orders, hence claiming a degree of superiority of status)<sup>307</sup> would never consider itself a denomination, although it may be argued that in England, in terms of its historic role and the size of its membership, it appears denomination-like. However, it is not my intention to argue for one designation rather than another for the RC church: an excursus into Roman Catholic ecclesiology would be a step too far.

Having argued that the Church of England is sociologically a denomination and not 'gathered' in any exclusive sense (a denomination is not exclusive), the most appropriate and realistic ecclesiological model is that of an unsectarian kind of 'gathered church': a gathering of those who have responded to God's call in Jesus Christ. Anyone can join, but because response requires some kind of active decision, meaningful membership does entail holding certain beliefs and taking part in certain activities, particularly participating in worship. But is it possible to have a more nuanced, and less 'black and white' ecclesiological voice, with a less precise, more embracing definition of membership? Furthermore, would a level of ecclesiological imprecision affect the argument for the nurture school in any way?

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<sup>307</sup> See, for example, Franklin RF (ed) (1996), *passim*.



I considered above whether an Anglican ecclesiology was possible, and explored, using a baptismal focus, the notion of membership of the Church of England. I contrasted two ecclesiological models, and argued that a more exclusive model was essential if the notion of membership of the church was to retain any meaning at all. As Macquarrie notes when reflecting on the phrase, 'the people of God':

In calling the church 'people', there is a recognition of its essentially human character and of its ties with the whole human race; but in adding the qualification 'of God', there is the assertion that to this people there belongs a depth and significance that differentiate them from people in general. A dialectic of identity and difference is at work here.<sup>308</sup>

It may seem an obvious statement, but the church is not identical with the whole human race. It is not a totally inclusive body. That then raises the dual question: where is the line to be drawn, and by what criteria? General articles on 'ecclesiology'<sup>309</sup> or 'the church'<sup>310</sup> will reveal that the first division came when the followers of Jesus, called the Christ, separated from the Judaism of their heritage. The church was a diverse body right from the start, although there were important ideas and practices held in common (faith in Jesus Christ; baptism; eucharist, the 'didache' and 'kerygma', and so on). Many ecclesiological positions were mapped out in support of the battle against heresy, and the need to prevent schism. Augustine was among the first to distinguish between those who really belonged to the church, and those who were (in modern parlance) just 'hangers-on'. The schism between east and west led to two ecclesiological trends: the former focusing on the bishop, whom the church gathered around at the eucharist, while Roman Catholic ecclesiology was "shaped largely in reaction against challenges to ecclesiastical authority..."<sup>311</sup> On the reformed side, Luther carried forward the notion of there being both a visible and invisible church, and Calvin actually claimed that the

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<sup>308</sup> Macquarrie J (1977), pp. 387 – 388.

<sup>309</sup> References to 'ecclesiology' are often cross-referenced to 'church'.

<sup>310</sup> E.g. article by O'Brien RP in Richardson A & Bowden J (1983), pp. 108 – 110; article in Cross FL & Livingstone EA (1997), pp. 343 – 346, and on the Church of England, pp. 347 – 351.

<sup>311</sup> O'Brien RP (1983) p. 110.

Elect were not only a minority within the world, but a minority within the visible church as well. It may be that this less clear-cut ecclesiology may provide a more nuanced voice which is relevant to the Church of England today.

A classic Calvinist ecclesiology, for example, finds that

...the essence of the church is not....in the external organisation of the church, but in the church as the 'communio sanctorum' [the community of saints].....the community of those who believe and are sanctified in Christ, and who are joined to Him and their Head....[those] who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God in Jesus Christ the Saviour, by the word of the Holy Spirit.....<sup>312</sup>

It is noteworthy that the definition here includes reference to belief, worship, and a Trinitarian theology. As has been argued above, there do need to be some limits to or parameters around any meaningful definition of Christian membership. In fact the definition of the church above would seem to exclude any who do not believe, who do not worship, or who are not Trinitarians. These are not among "the Elect". Nevertheless, for Berkhof the church is not simply the institution – the visible church – it also consists of an invisible church: the church "as God sees it", as opposed to the church "as man sees it". While Berkhof is actually comparing the visible with the invisible church (in that sense the invisible is prior, as per the Westminster Confession), we may likewise compare the invisible with the visible (i.e. we shall use the visible church as a more tangible template), and recognise that it is possible that there are members of the invisible church on earth who are known only to God. We should not be too hasty, therefore, to 'unchurch' them (although I have argued, it is more realistic to say that people 'unchurch' themselves). Equally, neither can it be assumed that all churchgoers are as yet "regenerated" ("there may be chaff among the wheat"):

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<sup>312</sup> Berkhof L (1958), p. 564.



It is possible that some who belong to the invisible church never become members of the visible organisation.....and that others are temporarily excluded from it....On the other hand, there may be unregenerated children and adults who, while professing Christ, have no true faith in Him, in the church as an external institution...<sup>313</sup>

Some Anglicans, too, have shared this concern to differentiate between a visible and invisible church. Reference was made in Chapter 2 above to a seminal paper by Leonard Hodgson,<sup>314</sup> where he also made that distinction, claiming that it had a “cardinal place”<sup>315</sup> in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation theology. God’s will is for a visible church: an “organised society in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered”. But the essence of Christianity is

....man’s personal response in faith to God’s grace in Christ. Only God knows what men are living by this response of faith to grace. They are the elect, the invisible church, the mystical body of Christ. The organised visible church is....God’s instrument for promoting the growth of the invisible. It is to the invisible church that the New Testament language refers which speaks of the church as the body of Christ.<sup>316</sup>

Hodgson suggests that although the actual term ‘invisible church’ is not used in the historic formularies, “the use of the words ‘visible’ and ‘faithful’ implies that the article [XIX of the 39 Articles] takes for granted the doctrine of the invisible church.” Such a view might appear at first glance to come close to the concept of the ‘anonymous Christian/Anglican’ considered above. However, Hodgson points out that Article XXVI(7) demonstrates that ‘faithful’ must mean “professed believers, not those whose faith is known to God alone”. This would suggest that he sees the invisible church as being internal rather than external to the visible. Nevertheless, he agrees with Berkhof that ‘visibility’ is, of itself, no guarantee of salvation:

All agree that membership of the organised, visible church does not by itself guarantee salvation. There are tares in the wheat....[so the doctrine of the invisible church] implies that the faithful elect form the church to which is given such promises as that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.* p. 566.

<sup>314</sup> ‘The Doctrine of the Church as Held and Taught in the Church of England’, in Flew RN (1952) pp. 121ff.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* p. 133.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.* p. 134.



Hodgson recognises, however, that there is no monolithic view on the visible/invisible issue in the Church of England. Whilst for some “the only church to be considered is the visible company of professed believers, including those who are baptised into it as infants”<sup>318</sup>, for others there are not two churches at all:

There is one church which *qua* invisible is definable in terms of grace and faith, *qua* visible in terms of sacraments and the profession of faith in response to a true preaching of the word. The visible church is the church in so far as it enshrines the invisible.<sup>319</sup>

Hodgson confesses that the matter is ultimately paradoxical:

When we try to resolve the paradox [of Grace: “Not I but the grace of God within me”] by interposing the invisible church as that which is identified with Christ, the paradox returns in all attempts at stating the relation between the invisible church and the visible.<sup>320</sup>

It is right, he argues, that the Church of England is somewhat agnostic and imprecise about its own nature, and in so doing is “truly scriptural and is silent where the scriptures are silent”.<sup>321</sup>

The concept of the visible/invisible church would, of course, play havoc with church schools’ admissions policies, for we would then have non-churchgoers who ‘deserve’ a place at the church school because they are actually members of the invisible church, and churchgoers who do not, because they are not. However, just as we have already noted (re. Berkhof’s ecclesiology) that the Elect had to be believing, worshipping Trinitarians, so we may note that the example he provides for someone who has not become a member of the visible church is one who converts on their deathbed; while the example of some whose faith is visible but not invisible is of those who “as erring believers who are for a time shut out from communion of

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<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.* p. 134.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.* p. 140.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.* p. 141.

the visible church”.<sup>322</sup> So these are not simply people who have little or nothing to do with the ‘visible’ church. In fact, Berkhof goes on to declare that “faith reveals itself in confession and conduct”.<sup>323</sup> Confession, here, is confession of faith. Hodgson, for his part, mentioned those theologians who included ‘those baptised as infants’ with the ‘visible company of professed believers’. That is obviously permissible in his view, for the church is equally silent on the question “whether Baptism without faith, nor faith without Baptism admits to the church”. However, he declares, the Church of England will be “satisfied with nothing less than both.”<sup>324</sup> The ‘requirement’, then, is for both faith and baptism. This would seem to imply a strong degree of visibility, along the lines argued for above i.e. both orthodoxy (in so far that can go in the absence of an explicitly Anglican theology) and orthopraxis.

Alec Vidler, writing in *Soundings* in 1962<sup>325</sup> referred to the idea of the church as a ‘religious organisation’ as one that was both true, and sad because of that truth. For Vidler “religions separate men from one another and tempt them to boast of what they possess and other men do not...”<sup>326</sup>, and he recalled that Maurice had felt that:

Christians.....with their rival and separating denominations, sects, systems, and schools of thought, had turned the Gospel into that from which it came to deliver them.<sup>327</sup>

However, a pejorative view of ‘religion’ does not, in Vidler’s view, diminish the importance of prayer and worship - “characteristically religious activities” - but the essential thing is how the church “as an embodiment of Christian community can be kept free from the domination of organisers and legalisers.”<sup>328</sup> In other words it is the ‘organisation’, rather than the

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<sup>322</sup> Berkhof L (1958), p. 566

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* p. 568.

<sup>324</sup> Hodgson L (1951) p. 142.

<sup>325</sup> Vidler AR (ed) (1962a) pp. 241ff.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.* p. 242.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.* p. 252.

'religion', which is the problem. Still, from the perspective of the 1960s (the beginning of Brown's disastrous and terminal decline) the church is needed in England:

...in England itself there are no doubt many individuals and groups that need not less but more religious and moral discipline if only that they may learn to do without it or to discriminate between the wheat and the chaff. Persons can enter into the freedom of the Gospel only when in one way or another they have experienced the discipline of the Law.<sup>329</sup>

The role of the church is to provide the groundwork (a '*praeparatio evangelica*') for this. So Vidler, again from the 60s, poses "the main question":

What prospect is there that the Church of England may have a continuing mission in a society where the traditional forms of religion are being outgrown....Is it a closed or an open church, backward-looking or forward-looking, in bondage to legalism or a school of freedom?<sup>330</sup>

The Church of England is, he claimed, beset by problems: archaic language, liturgy and doctrine; a parochial system that "struggles" to cover the whole country, and a decreasing number of clergy to sustain it. Establishment is simply "a survival from the time when church and commonwealth were regarded as in principle one society".<sup>331</sup> But now

....the generality of citizens looks upon the Church of England as a venerable, if curious, part of the English scene. They like to have it about, if only that they may criticise it or stay away from it.<sup>332</sup>

However, Vidler still believed there were possibilities for the church, not least because being a national church, it was distinguished from "a gathered church, a sect or a religious denomination.....[and] is inescapably involved with the whole of society in which it is set". The great question is whether the Church of England "can be transformed into....a church or is

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* p. 255.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 255 – 256.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.* p. 257.



doomed to sink into the position of a religious denomination”.<sup>333</sup> For Vidler the CE did still “ostensibly exist to serve the whole people..... ‘whether they will hear or whether they will forbear’”. Vidler blamed the tendency towards denominationalism on the Evangelical and Catholic revivals, while noting their lack of success in achieving their alleged aims. Perhaps, as noted by the Bishop of Southwell, whom he quotes, the worst has already happened, for “...what claims to be the church of the English people has been becoming a ‘denomination’, if not.... a closed shop”.<sup>334</sup>

While, during the 40 years following *Soundings*, that is precisely what has happened, it is not necessary to see that as a negative outcome (a ‘sinking’ church). Once again, the notion of the ‘closed shop’ is reminiscent of the language of exclusion and ‘unchurching’. But that is not actually the case. No Christian would seek to exclude anyone from the church; if there is any exclusion, it is an act of self-exclusion: neither believing nor belonging. Indeed, it is undoubtedly the case that the churches are desperate for new members, as they see their numbers decline. That was one of the central reasons for the much vaunted, but apparently less successful, Decade of Evangelism. The central argument of this thesis is that the most reasonable model for the CE school – the nurture model – is one which, while it may not halt that decline (if it is as catastrophic as some claim), it may at least help to slow it.

Vidler was very much in favour of imprecision: it is advantageous that the Church of England has an “indeterminate membership”, for the church is thereby able to provide “a home, albeit often a distant one, for all sorts and conditions of men....[who are] in varying degrees members of the church”.<sup>335</sup> So he provides a model of a church where membership is held by

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* p. 263.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 257 – 258.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.* p. 260.

all ('all' defined in terms of geography) but with differences of degree. The differences in degree include "non-religious Christians, semi-detached believers, and semi-detached agnostics" any of whom "may be nearer to the kingdom of God than highly religious conformists". Vidler quotes, with approbation, a tag which labels the Church of England as "the Apostolate of the Indevout"! He also finds theological justification for his view in the writings of Emil Brunner:

Who can establish criteria to judge whether or not the Holy Ghost is really active in a human heart....Who would wish to propose criteria of membership which in certain circumstances would exclude precisely those whom God in secret has begun to draw unto Himself? The boundaries of the church face to face with the world must therefore remain invisible to the eyes of men; a full dogmatic confession can deceive just as much as the entire absence of any such thing.<sup>336</sup>

Here therefore we return to the notion of the invisible church, and it has to be asked again what meaning can be given to the notion of membership of any organisation where potentially everyone may be deemed a member. Everyone is a 'member' of the human race; that, of course, is not an organisation in any meaningful sense, and to call ourselves members of it is simply another way of saying 'I am a human being'. According to Vidler (and Brunner?) everyone in England is similarly a member of the Church of England, and so everyone can say: 'I am a Christian'. That is transparently not the case. Of course, one can only agree with Brunner that God's Holy Spirit is not restricted in his work by the organisation of the church; neither is anyone in a position to know how God's Spirit is at work in any human heart. But to go on to claim that, thereby, anyone can (may?) be a member of the church is a step too far - if the Spirit is not restricted to the church, then why is there a need to draw everyone into membership of it? Vidler goes on to acknowledge that "this openness of membership can lead to acquiescence in diluted or watered down kinds of Christian faith and practice", and, of course, according to him that will be very dilute indeed, if it contains people who are "non-

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<sup>336</sup> From '*The Misunderstanding of the Church*', quoted *ibid.* p. 260.

religious Christians” (a term he does not define) or even agnostics. The church ceases to be a group of religious believers altogether, and (again, like Rahner’s ‘anonymous Christian’) everyone is a member “whether he realises it or not”.<sup>337</sup>

Paul Avis has also dealt with what might be termed ‘creative imprecision’:

The pluralism of belief and practice in world Christianity represents human perceptions of the many-faceted truth of God in Christ, as that is refracted through diverse cultures and life-forms. Where those come into conflict it is neither desirable nor possible for a central authority...to pronounce on their authenticity.<sup>338</sup>

This again seems to suggest that ‘anything goes’, and one has to wonder what kind of ecclesiology can be built on such weak foundations. There do, however, appear to be more solid foundations available. L C Lewis<sup>339</sup> agrees with Hodgson that there is a paradox, but that paradox is at the centre of Anglicanism itself. We have seen that there is considerable disagreement over whether there is such a thing as either an Anglican theology or an Anglican ecclesiology; however, for Lewis

....the Anglican Church has quite definite doctrinal standards *just because* it has no distinctive doctrines of its own.<sup>340</sup>

So how might a member of the church be defined? Lewis is refreshingly clear on the issue. He argues:

There is no evidence whatsoever in the New Testament that anyone would be considered a Christian who was not a member of this visible society, the church. Those who were saved were *added to the church*, and over all its members the fellowship exercised definite and sometimes striking authority. It is for this reason that among Anglicans the term invisible church seems quite meaningless [unless referring to the Faithful Departed. Indeed] Anglicans feel that historically the doctrine of the invisible church has generally

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<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.* p. 262.

<sup>338</sup> Avis P (1989) p. 310.

<sup>339</sup> Flew RN (1952) pp. 309ff.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.* p. 309; my italics.



been the expression of discouragement and frustration in efforts to reform the church. With the failure of such efforts in regard to the visible church an escape was developed by the thought of the invisible church.<sup>341</sup>

So the church member is someone who makes a public commitment. That is not to make grandiose claims, for the church is not “coterminous with the Elect”.<sup>342</sup> There are many good people who are not church members, just as (with Hodgson) there are church members who are bad people. Lewis sums up: not all members of the church will be saved, and not all non-members will be damned! That truth may serve to remind Christians that they do not possess a ‘God’s-eye-view’ of things.<sup>343</sup>

However, where does all that leave the Church of England and its secondary schools? Is some kind of public commitment and participative membership necessary for the church, and so for its schools? On a mundane level, the answer must be in the affirmative. To take admission to the church school as an example: because the law requires objectivity in the application of an admissions problem, imprecision, however ecclesiological desirable and/or expedient, is simply unacceptable. If it is the policy of a Governing Body to give priority to committed Christian families, then there has to be some objective sign of commitment: simply to claim membership of the invisible church would not do! There have to be some objective criteria that can be explained to Mrs Brown when she comes to appeal against refusal of a place for her child. Of course, had the churches and Government not combined to remove the right of church schools to interview applicants, it might have been that sensitive questioning could elicit some evidence of ‘membership of the invisible church’ (although that would still lack objectivity). Even the church, if it is engaged in Christ’s mission of reconciliation, needs to

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 310-311.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.* p. 311.

<sup>343</sup> *1 Corinthians* 13: 12

know with whom it is working. While it may be the case, despite the Biblical warning,<sup>344</sup> that if they are not against us, they are for us – but how would anyone know?

As for the invisible church itself (or indeed the more general notion of ecclesiological imprecision), while there are many truths incorporated into the concept, it is significant that its proponents seem to qualify it in such a way as to make its invisibility at least moderately visible. So, for example, Berkhof steers well away from any Christian invisibility which excludes Trinitarian creeds and worship; Hodgson seems in the end to want faith *and* baptism – not one without the other; while for Vidler prayer and worship are of the essence.

Of course, there must be those whose faith is known only to God. But within the more pluralist soteriology which has undergirded, and has sometimes appeared in, this thesis, there is no need to call them Christians. If we wish to adopt Protestant terminology, the Elect are known only to God; but some Christians may be surprised to discover that some of the Elect are actually Hindus or atheists (etc.). The invisible church, if defined soteriologically, may turn out to be a truly surprising entity. It was argued above that while one might be generally religious, it is not possible to be generally Christian. In fact, most people choose to express their life stances, philosophies and religions in some concrete form: from membership of the Church of England to membership of the (anti-Faith school) British Humanist Association; from membership of the Green Party to association with a Quaker group. Whatever the organisation, it provides some kind of identity. Sometimes commitment to the organisation may be weak; sometimes it may lead to fanaticism, such as those who turn themselves into bombs for the sake of their religion. Commitment will have a variety of forms and levels; but

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<sup>344</sup> *Matthew* 12: 30.

to display no commitment at all would seem both to defeat the purpose and to negate the identity.

In Chapter 2 above, I considered Macquarrie's notion of the church as a 'representative community', and touched briefly on the relationship between the church and the eschatological Kingdom of God, wherein the coming of the kingdom will lead, in Macquarrie's thought, to the loss of any distinction between the world and the church. In that scenario the church will have lost itself in the world.<sup>345</sup> The kingdom will be

...an all-embracing commonwealth of love and freedom, in which all humanity – and indeed all creation – will be renovated and transformed.<sup>346</sup>

If, prior to the '*eschaton*' the church is representative of the whole human race, then clearly there is no need for everyone to be considered a member, visible or invisible. MPs represent their constituents; the constituents are not, themselves, MPs. Obviously, those who take on a representative function, take on the responsibilities associated with that role. But it is no help to blur the distinction between the representative and those they represent.

Berkhof has a broader view of the relationship between church and kingdom (although it may be noted that Macquarrie's theology also owes much to Calvin): "While the Kingdom of God and the invisible church are in some measure identical, they should nevertheless be carefully distinguished". Yet he believes that it is impossible "to be in the Kingdom of God without being in the church as the mystical body of Jesus Christ."<sup>347</sup> He criticises both the traditional Catholic view (Kingdom equals church), and the views of other Reformed Christians who see the church in organic terms so that church organisations (he specifically cites "Christian

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<sup>345</sup> Macquarrie J (1977), p. 445.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.* p. 442

<sup>347</sup> Berkhof L (1958), p. 569.



school societies”, “voluntary organisations for younger or older people for the study of Christian principles...” are part of that organism which is the church. Such are not “manifestations of the Kingdom of God, in which groups of Christians seek to apply the principles of the Kingdom to every domain of life”.<sup>348</sup> But, one might say, if the kingdom is (as Berkhof himself attests) “primarily an eschatological concept”,<sup>349</sup> then it seems to make little sense to include ‘church organisations’ in it. There is a point where the two theologians meet, and that is in their understanding of the ‘*eshaton*’. Alongside Macquarrie’s above, we may place Berkhof’s idea of the kingdom representing “the dominion of God is every sphere of human endeavour”.

Of course, the fundamental point in Berkhof’s ecclesiology is that the church is a trans-historical creation. It is not simply that which came into being at Pentecost, but has been present in many “different dispensations” (in the Patriarchal period, for example, it was “best represented in the pious households, where the fathers served as priests”).<sup>350</sup> Berkhof notes that his view is in line with his church’s “confessional standards”, and cites the Belgic Convention in support: “The church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof.”<sup>351</sup> Nevertheless, the church is still (“essentially”) the “community of believers”, although those believers are evidently not all Christian believers, in the way that term is characteristically understood, for much of the church preceded the historical Jesus. Indeed, argues Berkhof, the notion of the church as “the body of Christ” is both very limited, and limiting.

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 569 – 570.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.* p. 568.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.* p. 570.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.* p. 571.

So a Berkhofian ecclesiology defines the church as a virtually unlimited entity (in temporal terms, at least) with a “many-sided character”,<sup>352</sup> existing in a number of dispensations, in heaven (“triumphant”) and on earth (“militant”), visible (in its activities and its organisation, but not in the way it is run – that is the Roman error) and invisible (in heaven? at the ‘*eschaton*’? everywhere around us? in hiding?), and it is both an organism (“the communion of believers”) and an institution (“the mother of believers....the means of salvation” – the means by which the organism is achieved). What the church actually is, is somewhat difficult to pin down. One wonders what might be excluded from the definition, particularly that of the invisible church.

Ultimately, therefore, I find Macquarrie’s analysis much more satisfactory, not least because it has a much clearer focus. The church is not (virtually) all-embracing, and its relationship with the kingdom is not the kind of identity Berkhof suggests.<sup>353</sup> The visible church (and to an extent the invisible church also, depending on the breadth of the definition)<sup>354</sup> is an historical phenomenon, at least, in so far as it had a beginning in time. The kingdom (presumably) is not, or at least not straightforwardly so:

...whereas nineteenth-century liberals thought of the kingdom of God as a moral ideal after which men must aspire and which will be progressively realised, twentieth-century scholars tell us that for Jesus and the first disciples, the kingdom of God was to break in suddenly, not as a result of moral advance, but by the supernatural intervention of God..... [however]....the kingdom of God is already present...[but] it is not to be identified with the church...<sup>355</sup>

Berkhof also sees the kingdom as both historical (Berkhof uses the present tense of it) and eschatological. Of course, the author of the Fourth Gospel has a similar duality, that between

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<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 565 – 567.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.* p. 570.

<sup>354</sup> Berkhof points to Luther’s distinction between an invisible ‘ecclesiola’ within the visible ‘ecclesia’, as well as to other definitions. *Ibid.* pp. 565 – 566.

<sup>355</sup> Macquarrie J (1977). pp. 351, 369.

an imminent and a realised eschatology, which leads to some confusion over tenses: "the hour is coming [future tense] and now is [present tense]".<sup>356</sup> This may sound contradictory, but it is better called paradoxical - the stretching of language when expressing ideas about God (where normal language is inadequate) includes putting apparently opposing ideas in tension. In practice, the Fourth Evangelist was writing from two perspectives, changing rapidly from one to the other: the life of Jesus when the hour is yet to come, and from his own point of view in the post-Resurrection/Pentecost church, when the hour has come (John was dealing in his own way with the tension of imminent expectation of the return of Jesus Christ). But while John had not abandoned future eschatology altogether (there are many references to the 'last day'), he recognised "its problems and inadequacies, perhaps more strongly than any other writer";<sup>357</sup> he found that the age of the church (i.e. the age between Jesus and the End) was not adequately described in eschatological language, but nevertheless the church was the age he was concerned with explaining. So in 14:23 John even speaks of two Parousias - of Christ and of the Father - to the person who becomes a Christian. They will (both) abide in him. But John is clearly not entirely satisfied with this sort of language, just as he was not satisfied with the language of simple future eschatology for Jesus. He needed a new way of expressing the Christian belief that in Jesus Christ a new age had actually arrived and was also to come. Therefore he uses non-eschatological terms to describe things for which others used eschatological language, and he uses eschatology to prevent errors arising from sacramentalism or mysticism. It may be that Berkhof is employing the same kind of technique.

If, however, a clearer distinction is made, as does Macquarrie, between church and kingdom, with the former more straightforwardly historical (and with a beginning 2000 years ago), and the kingdom as (to repeat Berkhof) primarily eschatological, then the soteriological 'flow' or

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<sup>356</sup> *John* 4:23, 5.25. Contrast 5.28.

<sup>357</sup> Barrett CK (1978), p. 69.



‘movement’ (and hence the mission of the church) is much easier to picture. Macquarrie describes this flow as three divine activities: creation, reconciliation and consummation. But these are not

...successive activities of God...[rather] they must be seen as three moments in God’s great unitary action.....only distinguishable aspects of one awe-inspiring movement of God – his love or letting-be, whereby he confers, sustains, and perfects the being of the creatures.<sup>358</sup>

Although the focus is still fairly broad, it is manageable. Macquarrie allows that the kingdom can be brought about not only by the work of the church (with which it is not identical), but by that of “other communities of the Spirit” as well.<sup>359</sup> Indeed, the historical aspect of the kingdom is therefore made much clearer (as many of the kingdom parables note): it is hidden or growing within the present ambiguity of the world,<sup>360</sup> but it is not, *per se*, going to be an event in history:

It is utopian and foolish to suppose that the kingdom could be realised on earth, though on the other hand it is not foolish to strive towards its increasing realisation...[but that] can only be in that vaster synthesis of Being, gathering up past, present and future, and perfecting all things in an ever-widening context. This we can comprehend only in a very dim fashion....<sup>361</sup>

The church, then, is still an identifiable body in its visible form (we shall not attempt to explicate its invisible form), a discrete unit, we might say. That ‘unit’ will be working to “spearhead” the kingdom alongside others, whose identity may well be known to God alone. But for the church itself, it would seem important that its membership is identifiable – indeed, why should it not be? To seek to identify its membership is not to seek to be exclusive in any sense; others, not identifiable, may equally be working for the coming of the kingdom, in their

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<sup>358</sup> Macquarrie J (1977). p. 269.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.* p. 396.

<sup>360</sup> For example, the parables of Mustard Seed (*Mark* 4: 30 – 32), and Yeast (*Matthew* 13:33).

<sup>361</sup> Macquarrie J (1997). p. 370.

own way. If someone want to define these others as an aspect of the invisible church, then that is fine, although not particularly illuminating or helpful. Indeed, as a designation it comes close to being meaningless.

Ultimately the issue is this: just how important is identity (i.e. some kind of open personal commitment and involvement in the life of faith) should one claim to be an adherent of that Faith? In terms of the visible church, it must be important (or it would cease to be visible).

Levitt quotes a mother whom she interviewed as part of a research project in Cornwall:

“I believe in God, you don’t need to go to church, Christian I suppose I’d call myself...I have a belief. I let the children evolve their own.” [Levitt comments] What is typical about this mother and son is their acceptance of religious education in schools and tolerance to those who are religious as long as they are not proselytising.<sup>362</sup>

Religion is fine, so long as it is kept private, and no one has any expectations of you. Levitt calls this a ‘normal’ religion which, with reference to a specific interview subject, she describes as “a residual feeling of guilt, but not enough to make her ever attend church, and a determination not to force her own children to attend, but to leave it up to them.”<sup>363</sup>

Furthermore, it is often assumed, she claims, that

...those with a residual faith will turn to it again in time of crisis. In the course of the research six of the mothers had such crises....All of them said it made them think about God but only those who already had a church connection turned to a particular church. However, rather than their faith being increased [by the crises] it was more often diminished.<sup>364</sup>

This reflects the somewhat introspective ‘so long as it doesn’t happen to me’ theology. Everyone knows that people (even children) become ill, are injured on the roads, or are murdered; daily, thousands of babies die of AIDS or starvation in the Third World. We cannot,

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<sup>362</sup> Levitt M (1996) p. 5

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.* p. 125.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.* p. 128

in our modern age, escape bad news. But, for some people, it seems to be a different matter altogether when it happens to them or to a loved one. People will happily attend church for many years, praying for those suffering from illness or disaster, but when disaster hits them they leave church because they are angry with God.<sup>365</sup> As a human reaction, it is psychologically understandable; from the perspective of faith, it may be judged, at least, disappointing: something clearly is missing.<sup>366</sup> But what people with a residual faith have lost, explains Levitt, is “their capacity to use, or listen to religious language.” As a result:

Their children had experienced religion as an optional activity out of school. They did not associate religious practice with hypocrisy, but simply saw it as something some people like to do.<sup>367</sup>

The ‘normal’ (nominal) Christian “kept their religion private and expected other to do the same”,<sup>368</sup> religion is simply something that some people do, alongside bee-keeping and playing Bingo. In a post-modern age religion is one of our personal lifestyle choices. Of course, people are free to make that kind of choice, just as they are free to make public their commitment to their faith. It may well be that this nominal Christian is a part of the invisible ‘shock troops’ of the kingdom in, for example, living a life of care and compassion for those in need.<sup>369</sup> Those kinds of acts would be (to use Astley’s distinction) characteristically rather than distinctively Christian; they are not, in themselves, Christian acts: you do not need to be Christian to be compassionate and caring. Of course, it is equally possible that the nominal Christian is just that; their self-designation is meaningless because it does not lead anywhere; rather like the baptised child who never sets foot in church again. It is pointless. But it may also be destructive, because if it be claimed that this nominalism is an authentic and acceptable

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<sup>365</sup> Argument offered by an appellant for a place at Canon Slade School, explaining why the family had not attended church in recent years (April 2003, in my presence).

<sup>366</sup> Cf. *Job* 1: 21.

<sup>367</sup> Levitt M (1996) p. 129.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>369</sup> *Matthew* 25: 40.



form of Christianity, the Christian faith and the Christian gospel are thereby diminished. Grace becomes so cheap as to be worthless. Of course, in terms of visibility, the problem for the churches is clear: will future generations even have this slight finger-hold on religion in their times of crisis? After all,

[Religion] was not part of daily life or popular culture, its rituals were not built into family life and elements of practice were left behind at primary school.<sup>370</sup>

Too much invisibility in one generation, and the next generation may not find anything left they can recognise as the church.

However, if this is 'normal' religion, why then do equally 'normal' people go to church (or is church-going abnormal, simply on the grounds that it is a minority activity; in which case there would be many 'abnormal' activities within modern British society)? The fact is that people will attend a church for a wide variety of (occasionally overlapping) reasons. It is no surprise to hear from theologians like Berkhof and Hodgson that there may be members of the visible church who are not among the saved/the Elect. Indeed, the point is made on many a church notice board that it is a 'place for sinners'. While it would be a reasonable assumption that people attend church because they have some kind of faith in Jesus Christ, if we were able to measure that faith against a scale ('very strong'.....'pathetically weak'), then there would undoubtedly be a long scale with people scattered throughout. Equally, some may have 'great faith' but a limited understanding of it; whilst there may be some theologians who will find that the camel had a relatively easy time of it going through the eye of the needle. There will also be social and psychological reasons for attending church: to meet with one's friends and enjoy fellowship activities; because we like the Minister (how many have left church because they do not?); because we enjoy singing hymns; because we find it comforting; perhaps,

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<sup>370</sup> Levitt M (1996) p. 130.

because we've been brought up to do it, and have never seriously considered not attending – it is part of my life's rituals.

In other words, it would be short-sighted simply to make the assumption that church attendance is something only done by the most religiously committed in our society. Church schools admissions policies only appear to make that kind of assumption (the greater the commitment, the greater the attendance) because there is nothing else against which they can measure one applicant against another. All kinds of people attend church, for all kinds of reasons. For some it is the central point of reference for their lives; for others it may be little more than a habit. But whatever the motivation, attendance says something: it shows some kind of commitment to 'the cause'; it makes a reasonably public statement; it provides some kind of identification with the mission of the church. The repeated use of the phrase 'some kind' indicates that there can be no precision when defining such things. But there is something rather than nothing.

Astley argues that because the notion that education and nurture as polar opposites can be broken down, the church school might be "something of a 'half-way house'", presumably half-way between those who take their faith seriously and those who either do not wish to do so, or are still considering making a greater commitment. As noted above the church school is not the church *per se*: there is no direct identity here. But Astley sees a link which encourages and nurtures a more open ecclesiology. The half-way house ("of the gospel") is so "empirically – economically, educationally and culturally"; it is a "foster home between our real home and the homelessness of the secular streets", a stepping stone (as Waddington) between the church and the world.<sup>371</sup> It is a place where

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<sup>371</sup> Astley J (2002b). p. 10.

...some learning outcomes may be arranged to occupy a continuous spectrum between being fully Christian oneself and understanding someone else's Christianity, because 'understanding Christianity' includes having some implicitly religious (Christian) feelings. A person who possesses these feelings will be regarded by some as already being partly (even if only 'implicitly' or 'characteristically') Christian, at least in the domain of feelings.<sup>372</sup>

The church school can therefore operate between the twin extremes of a secular and a 'seminary'-type of institution. Children would be given greater insights into Christianity than if they were in a secular school, and would seek to develop "more of the implicit and characteristic Christian attitudes, emotions and experiences, and perhaps even a few of the explicit and distinctive ones." In fact, Astley's 'extremes' are ill matched. On the one hand, the church school is clearly not a secular school, so that is hardly an extreme: it is simply an alternative; while on the other hand, it would not be appropriate for any state funded school to act like a seminary, so that 'extreme' is not an option.

Astley makes use of Bouteiller's concept of the 'threshold Christian' – people who

...call themselves more or less Christians....willing to be recognised as being of the church and to be linked with it, but they are very hesitant about being recognised as being integrally within the church.<sup>373</sup>

The threshold is, after all, "an integral part of the building; it is neither an accessory nor an appendix". Astley, therefore, wishes to jettison some of the traditional metaphors of the church such as the Ark, which connotes a place of refuge from the world, in favour of "dominical ones": leaven, salt and candle. These provide an ecclesiology

...that recognises no impermeable, rigid and protective barriers between the church-belongers and those who are outside the walls.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Astley J (1994). p. 99.

<sup>373</sup> Quoted Astley J (2002b). p. 13.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.



These are very attractive and helpful metaphors, but can they bear the meaning which Astley (and presumably Bouteiller) would wish them to have? Who are those who are on the threshold, and who stand on the fringes of the church, and what are the intentions of those who still 'visit, frequent, question, explore, love' the church?<sup>375</sup>

I have argued above that there is no fundamental difference between the kind of people who do and those who do not attend church, particularly in this modern age, where religious practice is accepted as being purely a personal choice, neither to be urged nor criticised because of that. It may be that as I bid 'good morning' to my neighbours out walking their dog, whilst I am on my way to church, the thought might go through their mind: 'ought we to be going there as well?', but I have no reason to think it does. After all, if it did, there is ultimately nothing preventing them from doing so (they might not like the vicar, or their spirit's willingness may not be sufficient, but these are not fundamental barriers). Neither is there the social expectation that existed even half a century ago, that there is something fundamentally unworthy about participating in non-religious pursuits on a Sunday. Neither should there be: Britain is post-Christian and secular, to which we may witness the abject failure of the 'Keep Sunday Special' campaign, waged only 10 – 15 years ago (and still around in some areas). If Sunday has any particular identity in society today it is as part of a 'family weekend', time to rest from work (so some idea of 'Sabbath' still exists), time to be used by the family together, playing, shopping – just lazing around; or, of course, to attend church if that is your particular inclination. So shops and places of entertainment are open: the new temples to which people flock are gigantic conglomerations such as Meadowhall in Sheffield, or the Trafford Centre outside Manchester; garden centres, furniture showrooms and DIY warehouses thrive on Sundays and Bank (some religious) Holidays. The fact that most

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<sup>375</sup> Bouteiller; quoted *ibid.* p. 12.

shops close on Christmas Day is more likely to be due to it being a secular holiday which is the family occasion, *par excellence*, than to religious scruples.

To return to Jesus' metaphors, which Astley rightly commends: if we wished to be pedantic, we might point out that the leaven is not directly a metaphor of the church, but one of the kingdom<sup>376</sup> which is not to be identified with the church (just as the church school is not to be identified with the church, although a mutual relationship might be seen to exist between all three: church, church school and kingdom, in the sense that both the church and the church school have a shared role in working towards God's kingdom). But even here, the parable does not merely describe a process, some kind of activity that must take place: "that would be the way of the western mind. The oriental mind includes both beginning and end in its purview...."<sup>377</sup> This, like its companion, the parable of the mustard seed, is a parable of contrasts: out of very ordinary and insignificant beginnings, God brings about his kingdom. So there is also that essential eschatological dimension within what, in Fuchs' terminology, is a 'language event', which verbalises

...Jesus' understanding of his own situation in the world and before God, and [which also creates] the possibility of the hearer's sharing that situation.<sup>378</sup>

It is the kingdom, not the church itself, which is like what happens when leaven is added to the dough and mysteriously transforms the whole from within. In fact, as Hendrickx points out, an essential element is the hiddenness of the leaven. Jesus wants his hearers to understand that

...what happens before their eyes is the decisive beginning of the kingdom. Their attitude towards this beginning, which is still a veiled reality will be decisive for their fate when the completion of the kingdom will have come.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> *Matthew* 13: 33.

<sup>377</sup> Jeremias J (1963), p. 148.

<sup>378</sup> Perrin N (1976). p. 111.

<sup>379</sup> Hendrickx H (1986). p. 48.

In this sense, therefore, the leaven, is actually being used with the opposite meaning to that which Astley seems to wish to give it. It invokes neither a half-way house, nor a more open ecclesiology; on the contrary it demands that something be done before it is too late: the kingdom is coming; will you be ready for it?

Of course, both salt and light<sup>380</sup> are metaphors of the church, which is contrasted in *Matthew* with Israel:

...just as salt is useful in cooking, preserving, and as a fertiliser on the earth, so the church has a usefulness to God in making the world acceptable to him, by its sacrifice and intercession...[again, after Israel's failure] now the church is to be the light to the world..<sup>381</sup>

This describes what should be the action of the church, on the world, on the road to the kingdom; it is not meant to represent a particular action that takes place within the church itself. It may well be that the thought in St Matthew is that the 'saltiness' of the church within society might bring more into the church, and in that sense, Astley's contrast between those who belong and those who are outside is entirely accurate. Where the significant difference lies is in the contrast between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century worlds. The church of the first century had no place whatsoever within Roman or Jewish society; indeed, it was the Christians who were the outsiders. For much of that century, they were also outsiders looking for the intervention of God, through the *Parousia* of Jesus Christ, and so one would imagine that those who, in Bouteiller's words were "very hesitant about being recognised as being integrally within the church", would have been of rather less interest – you were either in or out! Indeed, sitting on the fence was explicitly condemned by the writer of the Apocalypse.<sup>382</sup> In the modern world, however, the church which over the centuries has had a strong and

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<sup>380</sup> *Matthew* 5:13.

<sup>381</sup> Fenton JC (1963). p. 84.

<sup>382</sup> Revelation 3: 15 – 16.



historic influence on society, has now generally become an irrelevance to it – more ignored, than either revered or hated.

So what is the situation of those who remain in the threshold, rather than take the risk of stepping over it? This is not a soteriological question, because I have already made clear my conviction that the church has no monopoly on salvation. Indeed, membership of the church confers more responsibilities than it does rights.<sup>383</sup> Rather, the question refers to their position *vis a vis* the church. If they stand on the threshold because they do not yet feel ready to take the step, then of course the church should encourage and nurture that genuine interest; it should seek to remove any cultural or social barriers, and it should make people welcome. But there is still a step to take, and the decision must be theirs as to whether they remain on the threshold or not.

Although the threshold is an integral part of a building it is not, in itself, a particularly important part – it is merely a means to an end. There seems nothing intrinsically worthy about standing at a door, and not accepting the invitation to enter; most people would see it as rudeness, and wonder why they came to the door in the first place, if they did not want to enter. Indeed, to continue standing at the door would seem pointless. So if people do ‘visit, frequent, question, explore, love’ the church, what meaning is to be attached to those words? Plenty of people, for example, visit/explore church buildings for reasons ranging from the need for a place of quiet and calm to an interest in architecture. If they had it in mind to visit/explore those people who make up the church, then that would be a different matter; but presumably they do not, for they are still on the threshold. Although if they are there with their questions, they may be tempted to take that step in order to seek out some answers. As to

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<sup>383</sup> Luke 13: 23 – 30.

loving the church, it is really quite difficult to work out precisely what it is they are loving – is it, perhaps, what the church seems to them to stand for? But ‘loving’ involves a two-way relationship; and, presumably, people are on the threshold because that relationship has not yet begun.

The Christian is called to do, in his or her circumstances, what Jesus did in His, and what previous Christians did in theirs, to love, to sing the Lord’s song in an alien land.<sup>384</sup>

Of course, the church needs to think creatively about new ways of being the church: new ways of doing what they are called to do, and new ways of ‘singing the Lord’s song’. If the old models are becoming increasingly ineffective, then new ones are needed. It is clear that

...the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose....A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area...<sup>385</sup>

The *Mission-Shaped Church* outlines clearly the changing contexts in which the church has been operating over the last generation. It considers changes in housing patterns, work, mobility, family life and leisure time, and it concludes that “we are living increasingly fragmented lives”.<sup>386</sup> Only “fresh expressions of church” will connect with people, where they are.<sup>387</sup> But the “church without walls” cited as an example, is not just a church with no demands, it is a church to which people make a commitment, many of whom drive up to thirty miles to be able to share in fellowship with one another.<sup>388</sup> The difficulty with the threshold/walls image is that it is based on, and focuses attention on, that which is least important about the church: its buildings. But the church *is* people, and in the case of the church without walls mentioned above, it is a “witnessing and worshipping community”.

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<sup>384</sup> Capaldi GI (1983) in Francis LJ and Thatcher A (eds) (1990), p. 65.

<sup>385</sup> Archbishops’ Council (2004). p. xi.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

Among the suggestions made in the Report are church planting, the establishment of a new missionary order, leadership models, the role of bishops and suchlike.<sup>389</sup> None involve any concept that the Christian faith is somehow to be ‘made easier’ (except in the sense of taking the church to people, rather than people to church) or less demanding in what it stands for. When the Report urges that “the church should learn from its growing edges”,<sup>390</sup> these are fringes with commitment.

But clearly the churches, at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium, have some very difficult problems to face. We have already considered the effect of the educational market place, but the churches also face

....the unconstrained triumph of the market place metaphor and its comprehensive societal enactment resulting in massive attacks upon the integrity of many spheres of human life from which responsible autonomy has been removed.<sup>391</sup>

The churches, argues Roberts, were born in pre-modernity; they have fought losing battles with modernity; and they are now perplexed by post-modernity, with its relativity and individualism. Both the church and its theological discourse have been marginalised and ghettoised,<sup>392</sup> “trapped between institutionalised tradition and the market place of human needs and wants.”<sup>393</sup> A similarly pessimistic analysis uses Ritzer’s concept<sup>394</sup> to point to the ‘McDonaldization’ of the church.<sup>395</sup> What started out as part of the human quest for spiritual enlightenment has become

... a bureaucratic procedure, and in the process what looks like rationality turns out to be shot through with flecks of the irrational....[therefore] if the church offers only the same

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<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 130 – 143.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>391</sup> Roberts RH (1996), p. 181.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 188 – 189.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.* p. 194.

<sup>394</sup> Ritzer G (1998). *The McDonaldization Thesis*. Thousand Oaks, Ca. Sage.

<sup>395</sup> Drane J (2001).



things as the rationalised world of work, why should people who are oppressed elsewhere in their lives expect to find resolution by joining the church?<sup>396</sup>

So while the church just provides more of the same – efficiency, calculation, predictability and control – more routines, and even more rituals, it is “increasingly in danger of being left high and dry as one of the last bastions of modernity.”<sup>397</sup> At least, some might say, it has embraced modernity; but even that only in places. In fact, it is those sections of the church (and of other Faiths) which have rejected modernity, such as the fundamentalist wings, which are flourishing in this post-modern age. Many people will find security in a ‘home’ which offers some absolutes. Drane’s proffered solution, however, is that the church should actually accept more of the spirit of the age; it must

...construct a different kind of authority, based on personal individual experience and freely acknowledging the kind of ambiguities and uncertainties that will always be implicit in any approach which places a value on such things.<sup>398</sup>

The ecclesiological problem is that in our current age, with its distrust of absolutes, and its celebration of the right to choose, there are many who would fit the description of fringer or threshold-stander who really have no intention of stepping any further:

...unchurched people would typically have no sense at all that the church might enrich their own or their children’s lives.<sup>399</sup>

They see no need to pass over the threshold, for they are actually quite happy where they are. This is not the place to explore the reasons for that, for they will be many and varied. But certainly some of the reasons will be to do with what people perceive the church is for. It is there to be then when needed: in times of crisis, to provide colourful festivals to which they

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<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

can bring the children, to provide a backdrop for their wedding, or to help them celebrate the birth of a new baby. None of these reasons is objectionable in itself; indeed, they may reflect a latent desire to have a religious dimension to life, but they represent nothing that will further the kingdom very much. It may also be that the reasons have more to do with some kind of sentimental family or other past attachment. I well recall the person who at a consistory court opposed the re-ordering of church furniture, so desired by the congregation to enhance their worship, on the grounds that although he did not attend, he saw it as 'his' church, because his family had had connections with it for generations, and he did not like the proposed 'modern' changes.

Of course, the church will itself be part of the problem, for people seeking a focus for their own spiritual development, may find that institutional religion does not provide it:

...people rarely abandon faith altogether, they also frequently claim that leaving the church is actually a way of maintaining their faith. Increasing numbers of people today regard the spiritual search as something that is not necessarily supported or enhanced by involvement in the life of organised religious institutions.<sup>400</sup>

However, exactly the same variety of motivations and intentions, doubts and questions, values and beliefs will be found within those church families who send their children to a church school. One often gains the impression that it is imagined that just because a child attends church, and then enters a church school, that child will come free of the 'baggage' of modern youth, and that she is an apprentice saint! Nothing could be further from the truth. When I receive complaints about my pupils' behaviour on the bus, and I am told that the complainant is surprised because: 'don't they attend a church school?', then one has patiently to explain that children are children, and that even those who attend church may be naughty. But this is

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<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

just the same mistake as that made by those who assume that people who attend church are somehow 'different'.

In fact I would argue that the ecclesiology developed in this thesis is neither so precise nor as closed as some may think. I have already rejected any sectarian view of the Church of England, and it does seem to me that the concept of denomination provides exactly the right emphasis for an ecclesiology that sits somewhere – without too much precision – on a continuum between the 'church of the nation' and the 'gathered church' models. The argument has been simply that it must, for the sake of both reality and authenticity, come closer to the latter than to the former.

In view of this more imprecise ecclesiology are CE officials correct? Should anyone have access to a church school? We have already considered the very practical problems in implementing admissions policies: there has to be something to measure. But the issue requires more than pragmatism, as important as that will be in practice.<sup>401</sup> What are the arguments for making church schools more inclusive?

We have considered above issues relating to families of Faiths other than Christianity. What, now, of children of families which practise no religious faith at all, and who may or may not self-designate 'Christian'? Why might such families want to make application to a church school? Church of England secondary schools are often successful schools, achieving good examination results and seen to have 'good discipline'. Ever since the early 1990s it has been possible for parents to identify successful schools by Government sponsored 'league tables' and reports published by OfSTED, accessed via the Internet. It is understandable that parents

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<sup>401</sup> See Shepherd P (2003). 'Admissions Theory and Practice', *Journal of the Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads*, Issue 11, Feb. 2003. *passim*.



who care about their children's education will, unless they can afford to pay, seek out the most successful state schools, and do all they can to gain a place at one of them. This may mean moving into a catchment area (and so pushing up house prices); it may mean trying to gain a place at the CE school, not because it is a school which provides a 'distinctively Christian' education, but because it is a successful school. Melanie Phillips claimed in a Sunday Times article<sup>402</sup> that even the "liberals who denounce church schools" want them for their children, not simply because they offer good examination results, but because they value the "order and discipline such schools provide. They understand that their structured sense of identity produces an essential anchor that enables children to thrive in a world of uncertainty and loss". But is it true to say that only the identity of church schools offers order and discipline? Indeed, church schools in challenging areas face the same problems of "order and discipline" as other schools serving the same kinds of area, and some CE schools have been designated as 'failing',<sup>403</sup> and are equally avoided by concerned parents. What these parents really want is not a church school *per se*, but a successful church school. Ought church schools to find their mission in offering an educational 'escape route' to mainly middle class parents?

Some non-church attending parents may seek a church school for the same kinds of reasons that they seek baptism for their babies, or drop their children at Sunday School (without going to church themselves): they feel that there is something 'right' about it. In Chapter 1 I suggested that the Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on personal faith, had undermined the medieval concept of vicarious religion, where the priest was seen not simply as the intermediary between God and people, but virtually as someone whose role was, in effect, to 'do religion' on behalf of those who had neither the time, nor perhaps the inclination,

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<sup>402</sup> 9/9/01.

<sup>403</sup> In the 2002 Government Examination 'League Tables' three CE VA secondary schools were identified as among the 'worst' schools in the country.

to 'do' it for themselves (the extent of individual religiosity in the Middle Ages is a debatable matter, and has to be seen in a pre-Enlightenment context). It may be argued that the notion has returned, reinvigorated, in the modern age (although it had never been completely eradicated). Church membership in the modern age, in Davie's view, does not actually need to involve doing anything in particular: the tradition has, indeed, become vicarious,<sup>404</sup> while in Bishop Green's ecclesiology, 'Say one for me, Vicar' is quite acceptable.<sup>405</sup>

Davie refers to a study carried out in the 1960s in Islington, where in answer to the question: 'Do you believe in a God who can change the course of events on earth?', the reply was: 'No, just the ordinary one'. It is the believer in the 'ordinary God' who may be seen to engage in religion vicariously. Their beliefs have, in Davie's nice phrase, been "detached from their moorings":

No longer anchored by regular practice, belief drifts further and further away from anything that might be termed orthodoxy.<sup>406</sup>

The Islington study concluded that because much of this kind of belief tends to be superstitious, it can find no place in church. This is well illustrated by the ecclesiological focus, above, on baptism, which although essentially a church centred activity, is often replete with superstition.<sup>407</sup> This exemplifies the dilemma posed by the variously designated 'folk' or 'common' (or now 'ordinary') religion: should the church continue to encourage superstition on the grounds that if people ask for baptism, and are refused it (or are made to sit through a

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<sup>404</sup> Davie G (1997). 'Christian Belief in Modern Britain: the Tradition becomes Vicarious', in Platten et al (eds) (1997) *passim*.

<sup>405</sup> Green L (1995). 'Blowing Bubbles: Poplar', in Sedgwick, P. (ed). (1995). *God in the City* London, Mowbray, *passim*.

<sup>406</sup> Davie G (1997). p. 99.

<sup>407</sup> Dixon N (1979). p. 109. Dixon cites examples of parents/grandparents who believe (i) babies "thrive better" after baptism; (ii) "the hole in the head closes up when they're done" (iii) they are less likely to get measles (iv) they cannot use the carving knife until the baby has been baptised (v) the grandmother would not let the baby into the house "until it's been done".

course explaining the 'real meaning' of baptism) they will feel excluded, rejected, and never set foot in church again? The answer is often: 'of course not!' But when those kinds of beliefs go unchallenged (and it may be that they will not set foot in church again in any case, apart from attendance at other rites of passage), the whole thrust of the Christian gospel is not only undermined; it is contradicted.<sup>408</sup>

This is not to be particularly critical or demeaning of the kinds of beliefs which exist within a folk or invisible religion. People are obviously entitled to believe what they like, and who is to play God in deciding which are valid and which are not? Indeed, there may well be a richness in implicit religion. Wolffe refers to research carried out by Edward Bailey, and notes two key points: firstly, "the extent to which people see their selfhood, their personal identity and autonomy, as a matter of ultimate sacredness"; secondly, the fact that some people do see Christianity as providing a "framework of values which leaves the self inviolate, but which also provides the moral imperative to help others and to recognise their value and autonomy".<sup>409</sup> The first of these is particularly important, not least because it reflects the human insight which lies behind every organised religion: an awareness of a transcendent Reality. Any Christian (or Hindu, or Muslim etc.) would approve of such an attitude towards life. But, of course, it is not 'Christian' *per se*. Similarly, any values framework that may have been inspired by Christian faith is not limited to that Faith. It may be characteristically, but is not distinctively, Christian. Of course, as Wolffe points out, "invisible religion ...has points of contact with conventional religion". That is why some people do seek to have their babies baptised, or why non-church goers may be interested in church buildings. He quotes one such:

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<sup>408</sup> Such as the grandmother who assured me that baptism was vital, because if the baby died unbaptised, God would consign her to Limbo, and did I want that on my conscience?

<sup>409</sup> Wolffe J (1993). p. 334.



Well, it's part of our tradition, because I am British (sic), I am Church of England. It's part of my upbringing; it's part of our way of life. We are a Christian country.<sup>410</sup>

Whilst Wolffe wants to avoid any clear distinction between what is religious and what is not, because to do so would "distort a human reality in which boundaries are indistinct",<sup>411</sup> that cannot be avoided with regard to Christian faith. As has been claimed above, while one might be generally religious (and Wolffe's example illustrates that well), it is ultimately not possible to be generally Christian. Although people will place the parameters differently (the Evangelical, for example, would only find true Christian identity in those who have been 'born again' through a 'personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ'), even those theologians who wish to develop the concept of the invisible church insist on some nonnegotiable criteria being in place: Trinitarian belief, participation in worship, faith and baptism. Not, let it be noted, because being Christian is part of the British tradition.

Some, as we have seen, have suggested that the problem is not so much a loss of faith in religion, but a loss of faith in the institution of the church, that is the issue. Many people just happen to be those kinds of Christians who do not go to church. We have considered the essential nature of corporate worship above, but Bruce makes the same point more vividly:

Imagine someone tells you that he is a big football fan. You ask if he is a member of a supporters' club and he says not. You ask which team he supports and he is unsure. You ask when he last went to a match and he says he has not been for twenty years. He also admits that he never reads reports of games in the papers, changes channels when football comes on the television, cannot name any prominent footballers, and never plays himself. At some point in this inquisition it becomes clear that 'football fan' here is being used in an unusual manner.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.* p. 335.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* p. 338. Wolffe provides an interesting example of the use of religious terminology to describe the simple act of getting a cup of tea, which ends with the "thanksgiving": "'Jesus! that's good!'", and concludes: "To categorise this activity as either 'religious' or as 'not religious' would be unsatisfactory". *Ibid.* p. 339.

<sup>412</sup> Bruce S (1995), p. 47.

Similarly it would often appear that the appellation 'Christian' is being stretched beyond its meaning.

So, should 'ordinary' or 'normal' 'Christian' families be given places at a church school, possibly instead of practising Christian families? The argument of this thesis is that they should not. Not simply because they are not, in any meaningful sense, part of the church, but because it is likely that such parents are unlikely to meet the basic philosophical rationale for entry to a faith school: that the school reflects the values and the beliefs of the home. Indeed, it may well be that these parents have not even thought through the implications of becoming 'involved' in a Christian institution, and may not find its emphases to their taste. In fact, Christian values are often at odds with common social values. Anne Richards has described what she terms "problems with what the church offers",<sup>413</sup> contrasting a faith which requires "facing unpleasantness", which is "dedicated to God's kingdom", and which "places demands and obligations and asks for commitment", with a society which is (respectively) "concerned with short-termism and feeling good", "individualized", and which "engages in relativistic processes and pick and mix spiritualities". Perhaps uncommon Christian values will not prove acceptable to those who do not have a Christian commitment?<sup>414</sup> If indeed, one considers the values which seem to permeate society today, with its various gods (the 'celebs') and its rampant materialism, then it is tempting not to view Krister Ottosson's comment as an overstatement:

...society, using its educational system, transmits a whole variety of values, which do violence to a Christian understanding of what it is to be a human being, made in the image of God, called to be an inheritor of the Kingdom of God, and thus called to be a co-creator of that Kingdom beginning here and now.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Richards A (2003). 'Interpreting Contemporary Spirituality', in Avis (ed.). (2003). p. 87.

<sup>414</sup> Shepherd P (1998). p. 9.

<sup>415</sup> Ottosson K (1981). 'Education and Society' in Ferguson J (ed). (1981), p. 121.

This assessment, however, is somewhat unfair, because secular educational institutions, particularly schools, work hard to foster 'characteristic Christian' values in their students, and every school (even church schools) battles daily against the incursions of 'foreign' values from the streets, from the media, and from some of their families. Nevertheless, this does provide good reason for Faith schools to be places where Faith values can be unashamedly proclaimed and, in doing so, offer a critique of the world's values. This is clearly a role which the Church of England feels it can generally play in society,<sup>416</sup> and so should its schools.

This study has identified two ecclesiological errors, specifically to do with membership of the Church of England, and via that Christian denomination, membership of the whole visible church of God. Firstly, regarding those who have been variously described as 'nominal', 'ordinary' or even (clearly stretching the term) 'normal' Christians, those who are seen to be on the fringes or the threshold of faith, those who have been erroneously described by Winter as "...the sort of ordinary people who gladly listened to Jesus,"<sup>417</sup> (the whole point being that the people Winter is describing clearly do not want to listen to Jesus, or they would make some effort to hear the Word proclaimed): these people are thought to be 'anonymous' Christians/Anglicans, and those who challenge that designation are accused of 'unchurching' them, when in fact if there is any 'unchurching' (a woolly and unhelpful term) it is self-inflicted. Even if there are churches which are old-fashioned and off-putting, there then are plenty of others whose members do all they can to proclaim the Gospel in ways which make use of modern tools of communication, and which are accessible to anyone who has the will to try them. That does not mean, of course, that the church should ignore them; quite the contrary: the church must continue to do all it can to draw those who bring their baby to be

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<sup>416</sup> See, for example, Parsons G (1994). 'From consensus to confrontation: religion and politics in Britain since 1945' in Parsons G (ed.) (1994), pp. 125 – 159, which examines specific clashes between the Church of England and the government of the day.

<sup>417</sup> Winter D (1998) in '*Celebrate*', Issue 2, Aug/Sept 1998, p. 46.



baptised (only), or who attend on Mothering Sunday or Christmas Eve, or who are drawn through the threshold of the church by a funeral or marriage, into a more mature understanding of the place in the Body of Christ that is there for them, if only they choose to take it. This should not be done, however, in any way that actually compromises the Gospel which is being offered. Whether it is palatable or not, there is a cross that needs taking up.<sup>418</sup>

Of course, as we have seen, to say that some people are outside the church is not a criticism of them; that is their decision. It is possible that they are part of the vanguard of the Kingdom of God in some other way. It may be, of course, that they wish to contribute nothing of themselves to anything that might be recognised as God's work (although that would be hard; 'God's work' is pretty comprehensive – just bringing up a child to make a responsible contribution to the good of society, is to engage in a creative partnership with God). Again, that is their free decision.

The equal and opposite error is to imagine those who are committed church members to be spiritual athletes. In fact, the vast majority of them, with the varying motives they will have for living a more explicit Christian life, are the true 'ordinary' Christians. They are the kind of people who would have been fascinated by, felt challenged by, and were probably puzzled by the charismatic teacher from Nazareth. But they are also those who recognise that to be a Christian they have to make some effort to make real their membership of the Body of Christ. They may attend church 'faithfully' every week; they may attend more occasionally; but they attend. They may involve themselves fully in the life of the Christian community, or that involvement may be very limited; but the chances are they will do something, even if it is simply to give some money towards the church's work.

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<sup>418</sup> *Matthew* 16: 24 – 26.

The Church of England, as a denomination is, as we have seen, quite undemanding. It does not require strict adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy, it lays down no particular lifestyle for its members (although arguments continue to rage about sexual lifestyles), and it does not even try to insist that Anglican parents use its church schools. The Church of England has always proclaimed both its Catholicity and its status as a Reformed Church. It holds within its ranks theologians of the most radical kind, and those of the most conservative persuasion. In terms of churchmanship its Anglo-Catholic worship sometimes makes the modern Roman Church seem Protestant, and its 'low' churches make Methodists (many of whose ministers customarily wear stoles) look Catholic. It celebrates the Eucharist in the language of both the 21<sup>st</sup> (or at least the 20<sup>th</sup>) and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It has even managed to produce a legislative solution (not universally praised) by which it can keep in one church, those who approve and those who disapprove of women priests. It comes close to being all things to all people. It is hard to think of anything that someone could not find somewhere if they wished to join in the church's worship. If people, however they designate themselves, do not try the Anglican way of being Christian, it is either because they have found another (Catholic, Methodist etc.) way, or they do not want to be a Christian at all, and no amount of dressing it up as implicit or invisible religion can escape that fact.

If the argument of this thesis is accepted, the CE school, as part of the church itself (and sharing in the church/kingdom relationship), will be recognised as offering support to ordinary, and possibly even extraordinary, Christian families as they seek to nurture their child in the Faith that means something to them, whatever that is, for that is bound to vary both in intensity and content. Such a school will also, through its 'Domestic 2' admissions policy, be able to be a true "ecumenical nursery",<sup>419</sup> providing that nurturing support to families of all

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<sup>419</sup> Waddington R (1984), p. 71.



Christian denominations, and the CE school will be able to do so (and probably be better equipped to do so than the Roman Catholic Church) because the Church of England as one Christian denomination committed to working in partnership with other Christian denominations, actually has an ecclesiological template broad enough not only to embrace other denominations, but to share genuinely and generously with them a Christian Faith that can transcend the traditional Catholic/Reformed divide. The families the school will serve will (by dint of the admissions policy) share an ecclesial identity that is not simply based on the act of baptism, but will have been developed and moulded through attendance at the church's worship. If it be the case that there is a direct causal relationship between that attendance and the hope for a place at the CE school, then a local church will have been enriched by the presence of a family they might not otherwise have had, had it not been for the 'encouragement' given by the anticipation of a place at the school. They may well have that family for several years, thus having a real missionary opportunity, thanks to the school. If the family's Christian commitment was prior, and not at all connected with the presence of a church school, then the partnership between the school, the church and the family, can enhance the quality of the nurture provided for the child. The church school also has the potential to cement ecumenical relationships in its area, as churches are brought together to share in the work of the school; in its worship, in its extra-curricular activities and through its governance.

As noted towards the end of the previous chapter, at a time when many church congregations are shrinking, and in particular losing children in large numbers (or are simply finding it difficult to bring families into the church community) it is possible that the CE nurture school, if there were more of them, may be able to do something to stem that tide. What seems quite clear is that the general/service function has not had any significant evangelical impact in the



past, and despite 'Dearing' is unlikely to have any more impact in the future, so, according even to a supporter of the general/service function:

As the Church of England refused to define itself as a denomination, and....continued to open its doors to the neighbourhood children, it fell into the trap of not taking education seriously enough. Somehow, it seemed to say these schools will produce the Anglicans of the future – and they have not.<sup>420</sup>

If the Church of England, aiming to double the number of CE VA secondary schools during the first decade of this millennium, simply continues with the – in terms of evangelism, ineffective - inclusive model, then it is difficult to see what difference that will make to the future of the church, as the distinctiveness of the church school is inevitably undermined. If, however, CE officials were to recognise that distinctively Christian education can only be properly delivered via the nurture model (as the Roman Catholic Church has found), and can only be relevant to children whose families are themselves practising the Faith, then the church will have a much better chance of surviving into the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century.

Finally, what of racial and cultural diversity, and the associated alleged divisiveness of faith schools? A recent report from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made swingeing criticisms of single Faith nurture schools:

The government needs to prevent, and where necessary reverse, any tendency for faith schools to become mono-cultural. Faith schools do not apparently perceive themselves as having the potential to make a contribution to achieving social cohesion. The DfES should provide additional guidance to faith schools on how to address social cohesion both in terms of their admissions policies and their curriculum. No new faith schools should be approved unless they are committed to promoting a multicultural agenda.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Brown AS (1988b). 'Aided schools: help, hindrance, anachronism or trailblazer?' in Francis L & Lankshcar DW (1993), p. 166.

<sup>421</sup> ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee (May 2004) *Social Cohesion*. Para 61. p. 26.

Apart from the fact that the evidence base for these conclusions appears to have been quite slight (actually ignoring official CE policy; focusing on the two CE secondary schools in Oldham; and apparently ignoring the CE primary sector altogether which has many multi-cultural and multi-Faith schools),<sup>422</sup> the Committee appears to be ignorant not only of the fact that Christianity (the vast majority of faith schools are Christian) is a multi-racial and multi-cultural world religion, but also ignorant of the fact that all state schools (faith or secular) have to teach the national curriculum, which includes significant aspects of social and cultural education, and specifically the requirement to “challenge racism and value race equality”.<sup>423</sup> That is why O’Keeffe’s charge (written just as the national curriculum was being introduced) can now be comprehensively rejected, however true it may have been at the time of writing:

Where church schools are seen as an extension of the local church there is an inherent danger that these schools will not see the need of introducing positive aspects of the various cultures and religions which reflect contemporary society into the school curriculum.<sup>424</sup>

Any school which neglected this dimension of the curriculum today would not fare well in an inspection.

Writing in the 1980s, Russell Spittler described a momentous shift in the distribution of the Christian Faith across the world:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christianity was a faith mainly of the northern hemisphere. This is no longer true. During the 1980s Christian in the South will become more numerous than those in the North.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Both CE and RC Officials were critical of the report. Canon John Hall (CE) found it “tentative and based on inadequate evidence”, while for Oona Stannard (RC): “The inaccuracy of the statements is extraordinary and deeply worrying at a time when we should all be taking our responsibilities to promote harmony seriously”. *TES*. 21/5/04, p. 15.

<sup>423</sup> OfSTED (2003). *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools*. London. OfSTED Publications. p. 68.

<sup>424</sup> O’Keeffe B (1988b). ‘The Churches and Educational Provision in England and Wales’, in McClelland VA (ed.). (1988a) p. 202.

<sup>425</sup> Spittler RP (1985). ‘Children of the Twentieth Century’, in Keeley R (ed) (1985). p. 80.

Today this has become true. Whereas in 1900, some 80% of Christians lived in Europe and North America; in 2000 60% were citizens of Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>426</sup> Immigration to the UK over the last 50 years has brought many Christians from other races and cultures, particularly from the Afro-Caribbean heritage. To take my own school, whilst inevitably (because of the ethnic makeup of the town) most Christian families are white, we do have some Afro-Caribbean, Chinese and Indian Christian families. In this regard we are somewhat more multi-cultural than some community schools which take their children almost exclusively from a white middle-class catchment. Conversely, there are, for example, many church schools in London where the pupil population is predominantly of African and Afro-Caribbean heritage. The point is this: church schools which admit pupils on the basis of faith commitment, do so without any reference to any other factor: race, culture, or ability. If in any one area there is a preponderance of practising Christian families of one particular racial or cultural background (and an error commonly found in the debate about social inclusion/cohesion is the assumption that [multi] 'cultural', 'racial', 'Faith', and 'ethnic' are all synonymous terms), or even social class, then that is bound to be reflected in the school. Where there is a greater mix, that too will be reflected in the school. In one sense that is no different from the situation for any other school (it was noted in the various reports following race disturbances that many community schools were monochromatic, simply because they reflected the constituency of the geographical area they served). The only way to change this would be either to ensure greater social and racial mix in housing (which with such a large private sector would be very difficult) or to resort to 'bussing' children from one area to another. However, because many CE secondary schools serve a much larger geographical area than their community school counterparts (my own school, for example, covers the catchment areas of over 30 other secondary schools), and because many Christian churches have a

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<sup>426</sup> Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica (2004 DVD edition).



particularly worthy history of serving the disadvantaged in society (the Salvation Army is an excellent example), that often means that, whilst being single Faith, many (ecumenical) church schools have a more diverse social, racial and cultural pupil population than many local catchment schools. The sadness is that, for political reasons, this is not recognised, because church schools (being at least a little semi-detached from the LEA) often make convenient scapegoats.

Even when schools are less internally diverse, that does not mean that their pupils are automatically 'insulated' from contact with other Faiths, races and cultures. As even the ODPM Report recognises,<sup>427</sup> it is not only possible for individual schools to network with others, it is a widespread practice within an already diverse system. Schools link in all kinds of ways: through their specialisms (and it has been argued that being a faith school is a kind of specialism), through 'Leading Edge' and 'Beacon' Partnerships, through LEA, Excellence in Cities and LIG clusters, and so on. Faith schools can and do link with other faith schools and with their secular counterparts. In any case, as noted above, the national curriculum must be taught, and so children will necessarily learn about the richness of the country in which they live. That is one reason why it is essential (even) for church schools to offer a carefully constructed programme of religious education, which will enable children to understand something about the faith of others, as they become more challenged by their own.

Our distinctive purpose and contribution in education is to offer Christ: to embrace the development of the spiritual life and awareness of young people. Our commitment is to developing the potential of each child as an individual made in the image of God.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Report on *Social Cohesion*. Para. 62. p. 26. "Linking schools can help break down barriers between different ethnic groups."

<sup>428</sup> Dearing (2001) para. 3.42, p. 18.

These words from 'Dearing' cannot be gainsaid by any Christian educator. The question for the Church of England is a simple one: is this *purpose* going to be realised in 'inclusive' schools, or will these nurturing aims have greater relevance and greater effect with children whose families are also seeking actively to make the Christian story theirs? Is this *contribution* to the education system in a multi-Faith, post-Christian society, even defensible unless it is targeted at those children whose parents have proper reason (based on the values and beliefs of the home, and not simply on wanting a 'good school') to choose a church school?

# APPENDICES



## **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

### **Church of England CE Aided Secondary Schools' Admissions Policies**

#### **Interviews with Heads and Governors**

#### **Final Revision**

#### *Following analysis of Admissions Policy*

1. How was the policy conceived and established [evolution or planning]? Issues: rationale, involvement/consultation, acceptance.
2. What factors led to the establishment of this policy? Issues: over/undersubscription, new thinking internally/externally, Diocesan policy, parents, other.
3. What signals do you think your admissions policy sends to (i) the local community (ii) the Church itself about our understanding of the nature of the Christian Faith?
4. What signals do you think your admissions policy sends to (i) the local community (ii) the Church itself, about our understanding of the nature of the Church of England?
5. The motion of the General Synod in November 1998 stated that "Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation": In what ways do you consider Church Schools to be a part of the Church itself?
6. What discussion has/have the Governing Body/Diocese/Staff/Parents had about these last three issues (Qs 3 – 5)? Has/have any group (s) disagreed with the Policy? On what grounds?
7. How would you define the aim(s) of your policy? Do you consider that the way the policy is implemented in any way undermines its aims?
8. What difficulties [if any] are there in the implementation of your policy?
9. What do you consider to be the benefits and/or drawbacks of your policy, in principle?
10. What kind of school community and school ethos does your policy produce?
11. What sort of things would you point towards as distinctive features of your Church School? [What makes it a Church School?]
12. What do you consider to be the purposes of having Church Schools at all?
13. Matters Arising from individual policies

## Appendix B

### School-based Interviews

June/July 2000 Schools A - W

June/July September/October 2001 Schools X - FF

The order of school is the order of interview.

School A	Manor School, York	Head (A)
School B	Archbishop Sancroft School, Harleston	Head (B)
School C	Crompton House School, Oldham	Chairman (B1) and another Governor (B2)
School D	Holy Trinity School, Halifax	Head (D), Governor (D1), and Clerk to Governors (D2)
School E	St Aidan's School, Harrogate	Head (E) and Chairman of Governors (E)
School F	Bishop Rawstorne School, Croston	Head (F), Governor (F1), Worship Co-ordinator (F2)
School G	Archbishop Temple School, Preston	Head (G), Governor (G1)
School H	St Aidan's School, Preesal	Head (H), Governor (H1)
School I	Cartmel Priory School, Grange	Head (I)
School J	St Wilfrid's School, Blackburn	Acting Head (J), Governor (Chairman of Admissions) (J1)
School K	St Michael's School, Chorley	Head (K)
School L	Hucknall, National School	Head (L)
School M	Bluecoat, Nottingham	Head (M), Chairman of Governors (M1)
School N	William Farr, Lincoln (Fdn)	Head (N)
School O	Kings School, Peterborough	Head (O)
School P	Townsend School, St Albans	Head (P)
School Q	Bishop Stopford, Enfield	Head (Q)
School R	St Edward's, Romford	Head (R), Governor (R1) and Governor (R2)
School S	Trinity, Belvedere	Head (S), Chairman of Governors (S1)

School T	St George, Gravesend	Head (T)
School U	Bishop Bell, Eastbourne	Head (U), Chairman of Governors (U1), Deputy Head (Admissions) (U2)
School V	Bluecoat, Oldham	Head (V), Governor (V1), Governor (V2), Clergy Governor (V3)
School W	Ian Ramsey, Stockton-upon-Tees	Head (W), Governor/LEA (W1), Governor/Fdn (W2), Governor/Clergy (W3)
School X	Trinity, Manchester	Head X
School Y	St Saviour and St Olave, Southwark	Head Y
School Z	St Margaret, Liverpool	Head Z
School AA	St Hilda, Liverpool	Head AA
School BB	Archbishop Blanch, Liverpool	Head BB, Governor BB1, Governor BB2; Asst. Head BB
School CC	Ripley St Thomas, Lancaster	Head CC
School DD	St Peter, Wolverhampton	Director of the Foundation
School EE	Kings, Wolverhampton	Director of the Foundation
School FF	Canon Slade School, Bolton	Governor 1



## Table of Abbreviations

AASSH	Association of Anglican Secondary School Heads
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCP	Book of Common Prayer
BHA	British Humanist Association
CE (or 'C of E')	Church of England
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CW	Common Worship
CT	(The) Church Times
CTC	City Technology College
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
DDE	Diocesan Director of Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
Fdn	Foundation
GM(S)	Grant Maintained (Status)
GS	General Synod (of the Church of England)
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (of Schools)
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
MP	Member of Parliament
NCE	National Commission on Education
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NHS	National Health Service
NS	(The) National Society
NT	New Testament
OFSTED (OfSTED)	Office for Standards in Education

OT	Old Testament
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RC	Roman Catholic
RE	Religious Education
SA	Special Agreement
SEA	Socialist Education Association
SFRS	State Funded religious Schools
TES	Times Educational Supplement
VA	Voluntary Aided
UPA	Urban Priority Area

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